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### Dragonslayer Camelot liberalism

by Gary Weimberg

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Midway through DRAGONSLAYER, a lottery takes place to determine who among the virgin women shall be sacrificed to appease the dragon. King Casiodorus and his chief counselor Horsrik emerge in front of their impatient kingdom with a locked bag, filled with tiles, each of which holds the name of an eligible virgin.

Horsrik dumps the tiles into a bin. Scattered shouts conic from the assembled: "Stir the tiles, stir the tiles. More and more voices join in, creating a syncopated chorus of demand. Soon some of the shouts begin to change: "Draw the name, draw the name."

Horsrik, arm bared like a magician who wants to show there is nothing up his sleeve, pulls one tile and holds it aloft. He intones,

"Now, my countrymen, hear me. I shall die that many may live... I shall die for the king and his wise policy. And my name is..."

He looks at the name. He hesitates. He is confused. The crowd demands he read the tile. Reluctantly he does so. It is Princess Elspeth, daughter of the king. The horrified king rushes forward.

"That is *not* the name. The good Horsrik misspoke himself."

"Misspoke" is a word not in existence in the English language until a few years ago. It is a word given birth to in the Nixon era; it is a Watergate bastardization of language. To say "misspoke" is to admit having lied while denying responsibility for lying. It is a classic double-think word. "Misspoke would be more appropriate in 1984 than in a film set in the Middle Ages.

The entire lottery sequence is underscored with a tone of cynicism. Horsrik clearly exploits the occasion to serve as a propaganda piece for "the king and his wise policy." The peasants are reduced to a huddled

mass of potential victims, herded into the castle like sheep by the king's soldiers. The virgins are cordoned off and passively await the outcome of a decision, unaware that it has been fixed in advance. Galen voices the film's verdict on the lottery in a conversation with Elspeth before the scene even begins. "You've participated in a lie," he says condemningly.

It is confusing to find this cynicism in a film intended to be an escapist fantasy. There are a number of reasons to assume that DRAGONSLAYER was intended to be an escapist film. First off, one of the studios which co-produced the film was Disney, a studio world famous for its escapist pictures. Then there is the simplistic fairy tale like plot of the film, a plot so unsubstantial that only escapism could justify it. Boy meets girl; boy meets dragon. Boy slays dragon; boy gets girl.

Finally, there is the style of the film itself. The filmmakers directly imitate STAR WARS by emphasizing special effects and action sequences while ignoring plot and character. One can only conclude that the people who made DRAGONSLAYER wanted an escapist fantasy which would yield the same box office success.

Once we accept this assumption, it follows that the violations of the escapist mood occur virtually against the will of the filmmakers. Their goal was to create a heroic fantasy where good could triumph over evil. But the film is unable to do this. DRAGONSLAYER shows that even in their fantasies the filmmakers were unable to avoid a sense of hopelessness. Insofar as the value system in the film embraces the tenets of liberalism, the tone of hopelessness is a reflection of the decay of that ideology.

The story, slender as it is, begins with a group of peasants arriving at the castle of the sorcerer Ulrich (Ralph Richardson). The leader of the group is Vallerian (Caitlin Clarke), a young woman who has lived disguised as a man to avoid the king's hated lottery. They have come to the castle to beg Ulrich to slay the dragon. He agrees, but before even leaving the castle he is seemingly slain by Tyrian, the king's fascistic strongman. Vallerian and company turn toward their home, defeated.

The sorcerer's apprentice, Galen (Peter MacNicol), follows them and offers to do combat in his master's place. His first attempt fails and the infuriated dragon begins to terrorize the kingdom. It is at this point that the king imprisons Galen and calls the special lottery in an attempt to pacify the dragon.

When Princess Elspeth fixes the lottery so that she is chosen, Galen is freed by the king to save her. Despite his best efforts, she dies — eaten by the dragon's young in the only excessively gory scene in the film. Even so, the dragon is not appeased. Galen, armed by Vallerian and her father, goes into the lair for single combat with the dragon. Once again he fails. By now he has exhausted his own resources and is on the verge of fleeing the kingdom with Vallerian when he discovers a plot gimmick straight out of STAR WARS. The dragon is then fought to the death

amidst an abundance of special effects. The film ends with the king and the newly emerging Christian church claiming credit for the slaying of the dragon as our heroes Galen and Vallerian ride off, unsung, into the wilderness.

This usurping of victory provides DRAGONSLAYER with an ending very different from happy-ever-after. Although superficially happy (boy gets girl), it is underscored with a sense of hopelessness. The cost of slaying the dragon is the end of the age of magic. For Galen, it is the end of all he has known in his life. The king and his government, however, continue on, strengthened by the sacrifice of an opposing paradigm. No longer will Casiodorus have to compete with sorcerers for power. He personally takes the title of "Dragonslayer" and Galen and Vallerian ride off alone. There is no room in Casiodorus' kingdom for them. They will pursue their future separate from the corruption of society.

Galen's success is thus co-opted by the very institutions he has struggled against. In an explicitly political film, this ability of social institutions to co-opt the efforts of those who oppose them would be used to help audiences become critical of those institutions. In DRAGONSLAYER there is no criticism. The end of the film displays the filmmakers' deep cynicism toward the possibility of social change.

Because they have no alternatives to offer, they cannot imagine successful social change. Galen and Vallerian's final exit ends the movie, but it renews the corruption of the king. This helplessness in the face of corrupt institutions is the dilemma of liberalism. The liberal ideology is one that responds to social problems by creating institutions to deal with those problems, the goal being to make things fairer. (Equality of opportunity is the cornerstone of liberal logic and first elaborated on by John Stuart Mill). By trying only to make things more fair, liberalism accepts the status quo as a given. It is an ideology unable to challenge the basic structural existence of problems. This is a dilemma shared by DRAGONSLAYER. The value system that the film expresses is that institutional corruption is unchangeable and inevitable.

In the lottery sequence, the filmmakers confront a liberal but morally bankrupt solution to the problem of the dragon. When faced with the choice between the destruction of a kingdom or the sacrifice of a virgin, the liberal solution is to set up a fair system for selecting virgins. The king's policy is thus essentially a liberal one. As an audience, we are carefully instructed to view this institution with horror. Yet Elspeth's attempt to challenge the lottery and make it a just one ends only in her meaningless death.

This non-solution is the best DRAGONSLAYER can do. From it we can infer the cause of the ideological hopelessness which marks the film. The filmmakers see corruption in the contemporary world around them and so posit the same corruption in their fantasy past. They begin the film with the government already corrupt and end it with it continuing to be so. The only solution they can find is death (Elspeth) or total escape (Vallerian and Galen). They can imagine nothing else and thus become

hopeless.

If we consider total escape as a viable solution (and I would contend that we cannot; total escape is impossible for human beings, who are essentially social animals), then it is a totally individualistic solution. This too is consistent with the ideology of liberalism. The belief in the supremacy of the individual is firmly embedded in the liberal ideology. The individual is the basis of liberal analysis and in fact individualism is praised as being natural and necessary within the liberal paradigm.

The values presented throughout DRAGONSLAYER are individualistic. When change occurs it is never as a result of collective action or social/historical forces. The lottery is challenged by Elspeth alone, as an isolated single individual. The dragon is fought in isolation up on a mountaintop during an eclipse while the society at large passively awaits the outcome in darkness below.

When collective action is attempted, it fails. The peasants delegate a group to appeal to the sorcerer for help. This fails. When the previous king tried to fight the dragon with a group of his best fighters, he failed. The only role allowed to the masses is that of mass victim. The peasants respond to their environment passively, each hoping not to be the one chosen for sacrifice while ignoring that as a group they are all held hostage to the dragon.

The motivation for the king's corruption is also presented in individualistic terms. His actions are justified by the threat to his own daughter. When she is nonetheless selected, it brings out his most human(e) side. He implores Galen to slay the dragon and save his daughter. He responds *just like anybody else* when his own family is threatened. (This strategy of using the family to make a villain less evil is widespread in Hollywood films. To give only one other example, the mayor in JAWS refuses to close the beaches and damage the tourist trade until it is his own son who is threatened by the shark.) This too is consistent with the liberal conception of social problems. Individuals cause those problems and they are *just like us*. It is not structural forces that liberalism seeks to blame but the eternal weakness inherent in human nature.

The film is even able to turn an understanding eye on its own arch villain. "When a dragon gets old it knows nothing but pain," sadly recalls Ulrich. "It becomes weak, crippled, spiteful." Here too it is individualistic motivations which help make us sympathetic to the dragon. Implied in the sorcerer's words is that anyone would-be evil and cruel and "spiteful" if they were in as much pain as the dragon. Like the king, the dragon is deeply concerned for its young, allowing them to make a snack of the sacrificial princess. When the dragon's young are slain, it roars with grief and pain and responds like anyone would, by laying waste to the kingdom of Urland.

In only one area does the liberal paradigm work to the film's credit. DRAGONSLAYER struggles against presenting either of the women

heroes in a sexist manner. Both Vallerian and Elspeth are dynamic characters, fully capable of making decisions for themselves and acting on them. Vallerian spends most of her life masquerading as a boy to avoid the lottery, and the film praises her ability to pass between traditional sex roles. "She was twice the man of anyone in the village and now she is twice the woman," says one character.

By having the hero fall in love with her rather than the princess, DRAGONSLAYER seems to be making an explicit attempt to get beyond sexist myths where princesses are depicted as the ultimate pieces of property and the hero's struggle is to wrest from the king the role of the dominant male owner.

Only one line of dialogue fails in this pursuit of nonsexist values and that is enough to call into question the anti-sexist attempt altogether. When Galen goes in to fight the dragon, Vallerian tries to muster up the arguments to go in with him. "I was a man once too, remember?" she says.

The implication of this line is to reinforce traditional sex roles. As a man she could be dynamic and bold, but as a woman she is timid and shy, unable to keep her wits about her when she follows Galen into the dragon's lair. When she dons a dress mid-film, she immediately becomes a potential victim (via the lottery) and is reduced to backing Galen in his attempts of heroism. She can provide support functions, such as gathering dragon scales for Galen's shield, but she will be left behind. Physically she is left behind when Galen goes to fight the dragon. Mentally she is left behind when Galen finally discovers the plot gimmick which will slay the dragon; she can only run along behind in the forest asking questions and begging him to explain what he is doing.

This is a typically liberal good-intentioned effort at resolving sexism. Vallerian has the choice to be either a man or a woman (equality of opportunity) but she cannot combine the social roles of both. She cannot challenge the structural division of roles between men and women, but as an individual she can choose one or the other.

Overall, then, because DRAGONSLAYER emerges from a liberal ideology, it fails to come to grips with its underlying criticisms of society. The film is effective only in the suspense of its action sequences. Any other emotion it tries to project either rings false or is dismal and hopeless. DRAGONSLAYER is an uncomfortable mix of the flawed present and the mythic past. It loses the pure not-a-single-redeeming-feature escapism of STAR WARS because it cannot leave behind the social ills of this world. Yet it is unable to deal with those very ills and collapses, not strong enough to achieve any other tone.

Even the special effects (which on the whole are dazzling) suffer from a confusion of tones. The dragon is at its best when lumbering along in an ungainly fashion down in its lair. When it flies, it flies more like a spaceship than a bird. Occasionally the point of view from which we see the dragon is confusing. Shots such as a vertical angle looking down on

the dragon seem too contrived because there is no justification for the observer to be seeing that angle. What worked in showing future space ships maneuvering in a vacuum does not directly apply to a monster from the Middle Ages.

The best visual moments of the film are those linked most strongly to the age in which the film is set: the stony grime of the sorcerer's castle, the slimy interior of the dragon's lair, the muddy thatched hut village of the peasants, and the image which I found most magical of all, the distant torches of the peasants as they approach the king's castle for the lottery.

Finally, let me say I do not believe that the ideological issues discussed here were put into the film as a conscious, deliberate act on the part of the filmmakers. DRAGONSLAYER, like virtually all feature films, is a consumer good. In a capitalist society, consumer goods are supposed to be neutral, non-ideological. This denial of ideology leaves the filmmakers unaware of the nature of that which they produce. The dilemma of liberalism that is reflected in DRAGONSLAYER emerges not because of the goals of the filmmakers but in spite of them. It is a testimony to the depth of the liberal dilemma that DRAGONSLAYER can neither escape it nor solve it.

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### A Tess for child molesters

by Jane Marcus

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We go to baseball games to see a batter hit the ball. We expect Pavarotti to sing the right notes at the opera. A filmmaker can take liberties with a novel or a play and sometimes can succeed in winning a new audience for an old tale, as, my teenagers tell me, Zeffirelli wins adolescents to ROMEO AND JULIET because he appeals to their own instincts for feuding and loving. But Roman Polanski takes liberties with Hardy's book the way Alec D'Urberville takes liberties with Tess.

Thomas Hardy's characters may be victims of fate, but they are never willing victims. They shake their fists at the gods, and Tess of the D'Urbervilles is no exception. Polanski's film is a long, slow rape by the scriptwriter of Thomas Hardy's text, a long, slow rape by the camera of Natassia Kinski's lovely face, and a long, slow rationalization by the rapist imagination that that's how it is with helpless, hopeless victims. They never fight back.

The words "To Sharon" creep down the right hand side of the screen during the opening credits to produce the measured shock of "oohs" from a suburban audience. For everybody knows that the director's wife was brutally murdered, not, however, like a fly, killed by the gods for their sport. If the memory of a woman raped and murdered is the muse who inspired the making of this film, she has not taught the director either decent methods for mourning or decent methods for depicting the truth of experience. Tess belongs to history, like Antigone and Lady Macbeth. Her story is known by heart by thousands of people who probably couldn't tell you what Lady Macbeth's crimes were or why Antigone was a heroine.

The young middle-class audience going to see the film have probably encountered Hardy mainly in a classroom. And birth control and changing sexual mores have made Tess a less heroic figure for them. But Hardy's novel has also been loved by another audience across the years. Older women, Catholics, the poor, and those from cultures where woman's chastity is her most important possession, still identify with Tess' plight. She is the great Unwed Mother. And, when she kills Alec

D'Urberville, women weep for joy. For Tess revenges all the woman wronged by men, raped, taken advantage of, impregnated, battered, harassed and despised for her lost virtue. Hundreds of women must be going to Polanski's movie or one reason, to see Tess kill Alec D'Urberville.

Hardy's novel was censored, like Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and Joyce's *Ulysses* for sexual frankness on a taboo subject. He was harassed and forced to revise for his magazine audience, so he conveys the murder with the apt figure of blood dripping through the ceiling of the parlor of a seaside boarding house in the shape of the ace of hearts. Polanski is a cheat. He does not have to operate under such censorship. We sit through three hours of suffering only to see a cowed Tess sleeping on a rock at a fake Stonehenge to be meekly led off to death by the police. Not only are we deprived of the sight of Tess taking justice into her own hands, we do not hear her tell Angel Clare that it is his duty to marry her sister and so save one member of the ill-fated Durbeyfield family.

In the novel Tess grows and changes. She has two great moments in which she challenges the men and social forces which have oppressed her. She usurps the power of the priesthood and baptizes her baby when the vicar refuses to bless a child born out of wedlock. It is a powerful and moving scene with a powerful heroine. But Polanski won't show us Tess the powerful; his image is of a poor, pretty creature disturbing the bumbling vicar at his bee-keeping, meekly telling him of her blasphemous baptism. Polanski must have his reasons for failing to show this legendary scene in graphic detail on the screen. And the reason is that there is an unwritten rule against showing a woman justified in usurping male power. Only a priest can baptize. And a priest has a penis.

The second deliberate omission is her justified murder of Alec D'Urberville. Not that the audience could have any idea of how diabolically evil Alec really is in Polanski's sympathetic portrait of a simple rake. How far has women's liberation really come if it is still taboo to show a wronged woman kill the man who has ruined her life? Why can't we see a woman enraged on the screen? We see male violence against women all the time. Is the male filmmaker afraid that if we see an angry woman kill her lover with a bread knife that the murder rate will go up?

It is the political implications of this act which are important. For here Tess usurps the male power of judgment. The law will not protect her from rape or redress the wrong she has been done, or punish the rapist, or give her back her child or her lost virtue. She takes the law into her own hands and punishes the offender, as she took Christianity into her own hands to get her dying baby into heaven. But Tess' hands are a woman's hands. They are not supposed to administer sacraments and they are not supposed to administer justice.

They are fine for milking cows, threshing wheat, and hoeing turnips. But

even here Polanski cheats. There are no calluses on the hands of his cherubic eleven-year-old stilted fixed figure of Tess. We do not see her hardened and coarsened by work. It is cheating to sentimentalize the circumstances of women's seduction. It is somehow even more of a cheat to sentimentalize human labor. Milkmaids' hands are covered with sores. Hoeing turnips out of the frozen earth in a bleak November is not a pleasant task. Another gasp goes through the suburban audience when Tess takes a swig of gin to keep body and soul together in the turnip fields. But so brief is Polanski's picturesque tableau that it is like seeing Kathe Kollwitz' drawings of women field workers for the first time and then only for long enough for the eye to register the beauty of the brown and sepia tones of the drawings, not the suffering and brutalization of the workers.

The same is true of the filming of the threshing machine, that red monster in Hardy's novel which represents the brutal industrialization of farm work which breaks the rhythm of people's lives. And it titillates a modern urban audience in the electronic age, because its quaint rhythm and noise seems idyllic. There is none of Hardy's attack on industrialization, nor his portraits of the brutalized and degraded workers, no sense of people working and feeling the work in their bodies. In the film Tess romantically unbinds a few sheaves of wheat, which makes her very hungry and allows Polanski another shot of that pretty mouth, now wolfing down its food.

Earlier he had a long obscene sequence in which she purses her lips to whistle to Alec's mother's birds, which reminds one of the equally scene moments in Bergman's *MAGIC FLUTE* where the camera lingers lovingly on the candy-coated lips of the director's little girl at precisely the moments when little girls and big are being taught a moral lesson by the opera and the film about loyalty to daddy. Come to think of it, Polanski presents Joan Durbeyfield as another bad mother, the Queen of the Night, who embodies sex, death and social chaos.

If Polanski had wanted to make a modern Tess, he had a ready-made culture where these scenes are still repeated. Hardy's Tess is a working woman, a field woman, he calls her. Polanski could have given us a Teresa of the lettuce fields of the Southwest among similar migrant workers as deeply attached to the earth as Tess is to her Dorset fields. He could have given us a tragedy instead of a slick melodrama for male eyes. But then his camera can hardly equal the sophisticated irony of Hardy's narrator's view. He will not let Tess speak or act. She is passive throughout, and lying down for much of the film.

Hardy's Tess is upright. She walks and talks and works and struggles and grows from child to woman under the loving hands of her creator who subtitles his novel "A Pure Woman," taking the part of a male sympathizer of heroic womanhood. Polanski is a voyeur of victimization who infantilizes our Tess. Hardy makes it clear that the "President of the Immortals" who has his sport with Tess is the author's enemy. Polanski is angling for a seat as Vice-President of the Immortals. His demand for

sympathy for the victimized Tess turns tragedy into melodrama for voyeurs.

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### *No Maps on My Taps* Forgotten dancers

by Marcia Biederman

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As a child I was fortunate enough to live within the broadcast radius of New York City's Channel 11 with its "Million Dollar Movie," which screened the same film twice daily for a week (three times on Sunday). Since the "Million Dollar Movie" owned a limited number of films, they often repeated the same film several times a year. Thus, at the age of ten I was able to see YANKEE DOODLE DANDY forty-two times in a single year. Forty-two times I sat with my mouth open and watched James Cagney tap dance down an enormous staircase in the penultimate scene of the movie. I also watched two black servants nod and smile at him as they helped him on with his coat at the bottom of the stairs. It was not until twenty years later, when I saw another film — this one a nonfiction film called NO MAPS ON MY TAPS — that I figured out why the servants were nodding at Cagney with a look of recognition. They were probably thinking of the great black dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and how he had invented the Stair Dance in the 1920s. They might also have been thinking of the scores of talented black-tap dancers who, dressed as redcaps, had to hoof atop suitcases, or dance with brooms in street-cleaning scenes, while Ann Miller, Fred Astaire, and Eleanor Powell stole both the show and their art form.

George I. Nierenberg's NO MAPS ON MY TAPS, which I saw on PBS in April 1980, is the story of three of these black dancers who gather together to prepare for a tap-dancing contest at a nightclub in Harlem. The three dancers, Bunny Briggs, Chuck Green, and Sandman Sims, were once well known among jazz audiences and revered by other dancers. But by the time of this contest, the late 1970s, tap had met its demise even in Harlem.

In their book *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*, Marshall and Jean Stearns theorize that tap dancing is an Afro-American dance form, born in the early nineteenth century when black Americans added syncopated rhythm, or swing, to the tap sound of European country dances like the jig and clog dance. [\[1\]](#) Developed in

the early minstrel shows, it was performed by black artists to black audiences and by white artists in blackface to white audiences. This jazz dance form reached its apex in the 1920s and 1930s. Audience racial composition occasionally crossed over, as when the all-black musical *Shuffle Along* captivated Broadway in 1921. Tap, performed by rich and famous white artists who borrowed heavily from the techniques of poor black ones, remained popular through the 1950s. Bill Robinson, one of the few black tap dancers to become rich from dancing (although he died in debt), was recognized only in the latter half of his life. As late as 1965, Bunny Briggs, who appears in *NO MAPS ON MY TAPS*, danced with Duke Ellington's band. Soon afterwards, tap was forgotten, eclipsed by modern dance, ballet, and most of all by rock and roll.

*NO MAPS ON NY TAPS* opens in the barren backstage room of the club. One of the dancers explains good-naturedly to someone off-screen that a nightclub contest has been arranged "to see which one of us can dance the best." They do a little rehearsal dancing, accompanied by a piano. The camera shows their feet, then just their heads and shoulders, then their whole bodies. In a voice-over one of them explains that the beauty of jazz dancing lies in the chance-for improvisation. "If you dance ballet, you must do what the teacher says." They improvise, their faces revealing pleasure and camaraderie. They take cues from one another as they dance in a line, revealing the ironic nature of the "contest."

The film never clarifies whose idea the contest was — possibly the club owner or a promoter dreamed it up to draw people in. (As an added drawing card, Lionel Hampton, who used to feature tap dancers with his big band, will emcee the contest.) Later in the film Sandman Sims, explaining why he often dances in a sandbox, explains that you need "a novelty" to get bookings; he obviously resents the fact that managers have told him, "If you don't bring your sandbox, don't come at all." Initially I found the idea of the contest abhorrent — an exercise in humiliation for dancers who never got the recognition they deserved. Later, through reading, I discovered that "challenge dancing," in which each performer tries to outdo the other, is part of tap dancing's heritage, something like the jazz solos in which musicians try to outshine one another. The idea of competition appears to be related to performing for a limited audience. Jazz audiences tend to be knowledgeable about the music and place welcome demands on the musicians, and the same is true for jazz dance. "In Harlem the audience practically dared you to dance, and you had to swing," comments one performer in the Stearns' book. [\[2\]](#)

But Nierenberg makes no particular attempt to place the contest he is filming within this perspective, except for his inclusion of one dancer's remarks about the continual dancing duels waged at the Hooper's Club, a hangout for dancers in tap's heyday. Nierenberg uses the contest as a device to expose the situation of the black tap dancer. Never properly rewarded by the white world with its money and opportunities, and now neglected even by their own culture, the black dancers can't get a booking unless they agree to try to defeat one another in public.

"Dancing is a gang war," a dancer told the Stearns, and his comparison seems apt. [\[3\]](#)

The first close-up portrait in NO MAPS ON MY TAPS focuses on the dancer Sunny Briggs. He has long-lashed eyes, a delicate baby face in a head of gray hair. He bows his head in deep emotion as he sits in a Harlem apartment drinking and smoking with his two uncles. He explains that he owes his career to his uncles. They acknowledge his gratitude but in turn explain that they owe their subsistence to Briggs. When his family discovered that young Bunny could dance, they took him to basketball games to perform during intermission. We see an old still of Briggs as a little boy. He is puffing out his chest, rolling his eyes. It is some sort of publicity photo; a comic-strip balloon emerging from his mouth says "Wooo-wooo." The uncle explains that family members came to the games equipped with quarters and half-dollars "to get the whole thing going." In some old footage from the twenties Briggs is shown dancing, dressed in a costume of rags. The uncles make it clear that Briggs had to do this to contribute to the income of the family. In a grim litany, they repeat several times that his family lived "in the top apartment of a cold building." Briggs is touched by their careful recounting of his biography.

The second portrait, of Sandman Sims, is quite a contrast. Unlike Briggs, who is almost fragile in his quiet elegance, Sims is energetic, athletic. We see him running around an outdoor stadium with his young son at his heels. He wears a T-shirt. He is thin but muscular, the very picture of the type of black man who is popular among advertising agencies today. At any moment we expect him to start tossing a basketball to his little boy. But, instead, he arrives at the middle of the stage and starts tap dancing. His son also dances. Sandman asks his son, "Can you do this step?" Wisecracking, the son retorts, "Can you do this?" It is the refreshing upbeat image of the liberated young black, out in the fresh air with his son. We are just about ready to believe that all that old-time oppression is over. We are out of the cramped, foreign-looking apartment of Bunny Briggs and into the familiar sunshine feeling of the television commercial. So he dances instead of playing sports — that's okay. We can relate to that.

But Sandman Sims doesn't talk much about himself at this point. He remarks that he began dancing as soon as he could stand up, and he talks a little about his family act. From there, he goes into an account of his teacher. We are plunged back into the darkness of the rehearsal room of the nightclub, and we see a big black man holding a plastic shopping bag and picking' out some lonely notes on the piano. He improvises a few steps, then slaps the bag as he dances, This Is Chuck Green, the tap dancer who is scheduled to compete against Bunny Briggs and Sandman Sims. Sims is being set against his teacher.

There are clips of Green dancing in a club. Sims tells us that Green was in a "rest home" for many years. He hesitates over this phrase, then, as he talks, he becomes more forthright and we learn that Green was

committed to a mental institution for something like fifteen years. Sims maintains that Green never lost his touch for dance during the whole time he was in. "Physically, he was fine." As we watch Green doing his languid bop-dance with great concentration, Sims tells us that a whole group of young dancers fell apart when Green went into the institution and that they reunited and worked harder when he came out.

Though candid about Green, Sims is protective of him, as is the filmmaker. Because Green is inarticulate, Sims does the narration for Green's portrait. Only after we have heard much about Green's history are we allowed to hear Green himself. Through the contrivance of the filmmaker, Green is shown conversing with his mentor, a famous old dancer, John Bubbles, while another camera shows Bubbles talking on the phone in L.A. Green seems pleased to be talking to his teacher, but when Bubbles asks him, "Are you working much now?" Green covers his face with his hand and says that he is not. Later, Green is shown wearing a sweatshirt with the hood up, indoors. He says that he heard a new tune the other day. "This guy was singing, Got no maps on my taps," He laughs to himself a little. Green hangs in a delicate balance.

Sims switches to other subjects. Out of doors again, he plays the part of the interviewer, facing the camera crew. Simulating a television reporter, he interviews an old man on a sidewalk in Harlem. His question is, "Why do you dance?" The old man is tongue-tied, so Sims graciously saves him by saying, "I know why I dance. I dance to try to dance as well as this man, Candy." His respect for the older performer is compelling and unfeigned.

Sims performs another role in the production as he narrates some history of great jazz tap dancers. We see clips of Bill Robinson dancing up and down stairs, dressed as a butler, in *THE LITTLE COLONEL* (1935) with Shirley Temple. Then Bunny Briggs recalls Bill Robinson as he sits on a stoop. Robinson, it seems, saw Briggs perform when he was still a little boy and invited him to travel with him. Briggs's family would not allow it, and Briggs regrets the lost opportunity.

Again there is a cut to Sims. Sims does not sit on stoops and appears to have no regrets. But slowly this illusion is shattered. As Sims runs around the Apollo Theater with his son, we learn that he, too, has been disappointed. He debates effectively with the manager of the Apollo, chiding him for sacrificing dancing to rock and roll. Insistent but not hostile, he tells the manager the kids would love tap dancing if they could be exposed to it. "How do you know it wouldn't sell if you won't even try it?" he asks. Sims claims that kids have been impressed with him, coming up and asking him. "What is it you are doing with your feet?" They've seen Gene Kelly. Fred Astaire, but never a black man tap dancing. The manager shrugs off these questions.

Soon after this scene, Sims recounts the humiliation of having to always perform in a sandbox. He stresses his adaptability. This "novelty," he says, kept him working through the years of rock and roll.

On the afternoon before the contest, the three dancers are shown leaving the nightclub. Suddenly Sims starts yelling, "Let's have the contest here and now, on this sidewalk," He is half joking, half serious. Has the prospect of the contest produced all this tension? Sims boasts that he is going to beat Green, although the rule is that the student should not surpass the teacher. Green is annoyed by this outburst and irritably shouts. "Don't touch me, don't touch me." This is the rare kind of psycho-dramatic moment that only seems to occur when people are aware of being filmed in documentaries.

The nightclub contest takes place as scheduled. Each dancer performs excellently in a distinctive style. The audience, almost 100 percent black, is appreciative. When Sims comes on, many of them recognize this youngest dancer, yelling, "Sandman, Sandman." The three dance together at the end. We see them changing back-stage. Green complains that the static from the sound system distracted him. Briggs and Sims reassure him that he was great.

There is some interviewing of the audience. The film makes it appear that the contest will be formally decided by audience vote, though this is not clarified. One woman says that Briggs is great — he's been dancing for years." A man is familiar with Sims, saying that he is one of the best dancers alive. There are some more opinions for Sims and Briggs. The last shot is of Green, looking spent and anxious as an aide or a friend mops off his forehead. If there were any "votes" for Green, who was once enormously respected within the jazz dance community, Nierenberg hasn't let us hear them. The opinions that we have heard have been based on familiarity. Green was out of circulation for fifteen years.

The last shot is reminiscent of the closing looks at Anthony Quinn in *REQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT*. But *NO MAPS ON MY TAPS* is no requiem. Though Chuck Green has been institutionalized and we worry about him, he still can dance. Briggs has been saddened and oppressed, but he's still going strong. His wife is shown, laughingly voting for him after the contest.

Most of all, the appealing Sandman Sims, who is not as young as he seems (he told a *New York Times* reporter after the release of the film that his age is a "matter of opinion"), infuses the film with brightness. His son may or may not represent the hope for the future, but Sims has not repudiated or sentimentalized his past. Still living on top of his "roots" instead of tearing away from them, he feels at home with the older dancers. Energetic and modern, he wears a baseball hat and T-shirt, but his T-shirt reads "Harlem."

The dancers in this film are now receiving some ephemeral attention as they tour with the movie (for what paltry remuneration one can only imagine, since a ticket to a recent Connecticut screening/performance cost only \$4). Surprisingly, not only Sims but also Chuck Green has been appearing at many of the screenings, jumping onto the stage to dance after the credits. Whether these artists will ever be steadily employed again is doubtful. There are real limitations placed on them by a white-

controlled art industry and the marketing concerns of promoters and managers. But, as Chuck Green says, "There are no maps on my taps" — whatever that means. Obviously it has something to do with courage.

## Notes

[1.](#) Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Dance* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1968).

[2.](#) Ibid., p. 218.

[3.](#) Ibid., p. 346.

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### *Kramer vs. Kramer* A fraudulent view

by Eileen Malloy

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KRAMER VS KRAMER is Hollywood's answer to contemporary questions of male parenting, the erosion of the family, and the women's movement. The film defines the problem as how to preserve the preponderant influence and authority of the male father figure as this figure makes its way from the public to the domestic sphere.

We can use the film as a test case for the feminist analysis of the family. Any analysis of the family will state the assumptions that need to be held in order to value the family as an institution. If the feminist analysis describes the family in a way that can be used to read the ideology of this movie, then it is an explanatory and accurate analysis.

Capitalist ideology dominates Hollywood movies. Ideology is anything in language and in material practice which serves to maintain the existing means of production without physical force. The family is an important means of producing a certain kind of person. As a Hollywood movie. KRAMER VS. KRAMER will maintain, not question, the structure of the institution.

As the myth has it, the family consists of two opposite sex parents and their biological offspring. Each is an individual; they have egos that can be strong or weak. The home, or the domestic sphere, is a haven from the other part of modern life, the public sphere. These two environments are mutually exclusive. A woman's biological role in child bearing makes her ideally suited to operate in the domestic sphere. The male parent, operating in the public sphere, provides for all the material needs of the family; the woman provides for the emotional needs. The antithesis of the individual as an individual and the individual as a member of society is located most generally within the family. Restated by feminists, this antithesis has become their slogan — "the personal is political."

This set of assumptions is the substance of the myth of the nuclear family. It's a norm, a standard that represents as desirable one specific

set of relationships. The myth can only be realized by an upper-class family. If the nuclear family exists anywhere at all it's not in the lower classes, where economic necessity dictates either two wage-earning parents or state-paid parenthood. Likewise the myth has nothing to do with many black families, gay couples, or single or remarried parents because they simply do not fit the physical description of two opposite sex parents raising their own biological offspring.

Despite the fact that *KRAMER VS. KRAMER* shows a family that gets reorganized, the reorganization is not based on a confrontation with these issues. The film reaches an ambiguous position in relation to the family that allows the audience to occupy any and all positions in relation to the subject matter of the film.

An instance of this ambiguity occurs in a conversation between Hoffman and his boss. The boss is worrying about Hoffman's ability to perform on the job and care for his son besides. The boss says, "We need you seven days a week, 100%." Hoffman replies by promising eight days a week, 110%. "I'm no loser," he says. This is an example of the perversion of basic human values that accompanies the sexual division of labor in the family. To produce advertising copy is to be a winner; to care for a child is to be a loser. Is there anything in the depiction of the boss, in Hoffman, or in the work environment that suggests a criticism of this ethic?

The assumption that needs to be confronted here is the one that says that two mutually exclusive value systems operate — one in the home, another in the public sphere. All human values reside in the home, usually in the mother. To the father are left the public and most dehumanizing roles.

In the first place, Streep leaves the marriage, and though it is not stated as such in the dialogue we can gather that it is the typical breakup of a professional couple. The wife is unfulfilled and the husband is preoccupied with his career.

Further, once Hoffman has assumed the mother role, sparks fly when his public and domestic roles come into contact with each other. The boy spills soda on his father's papers at home, and a fight between them ensues. Billy calls the office and Hoffman is interrupted in the middle of a conversation with his boss, so Hoffman experiences the call as an embarrassment and an intrusion. The boss has just been saying when Billy calls, "Frankly, Ted, I'm worried. Why don't you send the boy to live with relatives for a while?" Hoffman misses a closing because he has to stay home when the boy is sick. Hoffman finally loses his job because of these problems.

But the ghettoization of human values in the domestic sphere is left ultimately uncriticized. The ad world doesn't look all that bad in this movie. The values of non-contractual relationships — things like unconditional love, empathy, and trust — may not abound, but Hoffman and his boss chat on personal grounds. It's hard to keep in mind when

watching KRAMER VS KRAMER that Richard Nixon recruited his hounds and henchmen from this very advertising profession (but then Hoffman was on the opposite side in that movie).

The strategy that is used to trivialize the issue of human values in the workplace is to slide the conflict off of Hoffman's dual role and to place emphasis instead on Hoffman's manly pride. There's nothing really wrong with the business world. Hoffman gets scolded for missing a closing when his son is sick. But during the scene when Hoffman is fired, his boss offers him a cash loan, and Hoffman responds with, "Shame on you." I guess that means "shame on you for not treating me with more respect." Hoffman feels that he personally has lost the respect of his superior, so he storms righteously out of that job.

There never is a reconciliation of the conflicting roles. Does Hoffman choose to be a "loser"? Not exactly. He quickly regains omnipotence in the business world; he gets a new job within twenty-four hours of being fired, and when his son asks how he got the job, he answers simply, "I told them I wanted it." Does he decide that he can't care adequately for the child? No. In the end he still has the kid. Nothing changes. How does he do it? What accommodations has he made? What concessions to the conflicting demands has he worked out?

Hoffman's job change doesn't just miss the point of the conflict between the public and domestic roles; it represents a gross misrepresentation of the analogous situation in the case of single mothers. Hoffman's salary drops from \$33,000 to \$28,200. In 1977 the average U.S. family income in a household headed by a woman was \$7,742 (U.S. Census figure). When a married woman loses her job to become a parent, that career interruption can last anywhere from a few days to her lifetime. For a woman, married or single, the stakes being played with in the sexual division of labor are a thousand times greater than Hoffman's or Streep's in this film. The parallel implied in the film is a false one.

Hoffman's situation is of course greatly eased by his financial security. The salary sited for him is high, but the lifestyle depicted in the film would actually require an even higher salary than that. The lifestyle and salary given for Hoffman are at variance to facilitate identification with the family. Presumably the lower the character's income, the easier it is for average viewers to project themselves into the roles portrayed on the screen. But the roles must be optimally pleasurable to occupy, so financial worries are not admitted into the story. The emotional and psychological problems of the characters are trivialized in comparison to average real-life counterparts of the Kramer family, and a fantasy financial security is compatible with the general ease of their existence. It's clear from the financial picture of the Kramer family that the film is sincere only about perpetrating the upper-class myth of the nuclear family.

This fraudulent misrepresentation of real-life situations continues in the depiction of the father-son relationship. Maybe Hoffman really does do both; maybe his childcare tactics are exemplary. But the real demands

and conflicts of a parent-child relationship are never shown. There is, in the first place, no mention of the practical, constant concerns of childcare. Where are his socks, his shoes, books, coat, hat, mittens, boots? Does he have clean clothes? What about his schoolwork? How does the father use discipline? The one discipline scene reminded me of how I dealt with the children I babysat for when I was twelve; Hoffman uses threats that are cutely ignored. The father-son relationship contains nothing but casual conversations and bargains. Twice Hoffman says to the boy. "We made a deal..."

The child is used to develop tension in this emotional vacuum. Billy is played in the super-cute, super-real, "Life Cereal" commercial style. The style becomes more and more insipid as the story unfolds and the child is manipulated to perform specific functions in the family melodrama. The child strikes a chord of fear and empathy in the audience that strengthens the sense of immediacy and trauma in the plot. When Billy hurts himself on the playground, it provides a dramatic scene in which Hoffman rushes to the hospital on foot, with the child in his arms. Here especially Hoffman is shown as noble for being a man and meeting his son's needs. Yet women do that all the time and probably with more sensitivity.

The audience identifies with Hoffman's emotions through the child, and through this identification the film plays on the audience's own fear of loss within the family. There is a scene towards the end of the movie in which Hoffman tells the boy that he is going to go back to live with his mother again. The child asks questions like, "Where will my toys be now?" and "Who will kiss me goodnight?" These seem intended to give us the child's experience of the changes in his life. But most of the scene is shot objectively or from Hoffman's point of view, so the questions become painful details of Hoffman's emotional loss.

An illusion of father-son equality is created because the boy is used as Hoffman's tutor in Hoffman's period of apprenticeship in the kitchen. When Hoffman tries to make breakfast the first morning they are alone together, the child displays more knowledge and control of the workings of a kitchen than his father has. The boy makes rigid demands when they go grocery shopping together.

The domestic scenes that are shown take on a men's club atmosphere. The two "men" carry on silent morning ritual. They pee in the same way each morning and read at the breakfast table together. A breakfast scene is shown at the end of the film that rhymes humorously with that first breakfast scene; everything is the same, except that the boy and Hoffman work together like a well-oiled machine. Billy has facilitated Hoffman's control of domestic space; the men are now as smooth and natural together in the kitchen as if the mother had never been there.

Nutritional concerns are not represented in the meals of Tab and TV dinners or donuts and orange juice. The breakfast meal is relaxed but silent, and the figure of the mother in housecoat and curlers trying to make conversation is conspicuously absent. These scenes depict the

utopian promise of a family as safe refuge from the stressful life of a corporate big shot.

This men's club atmosphere replaces a depiction of the emotional conflict that would result if a man who had previously thought of little more than his career was suddenly forced into facing the emotional demands of child care. Has Hoffman ever considered what values he would like to inculcate in his son and what means he would use towards that end? This film makes no concession to less easily trivialized aspects of single parenting. Everything, down to the degree of Hoffman's ineptitude in the kitchen, is a caricature of everyday situations.

The father's position in relation to his son is glossed over and made humorous, and his role as a newly single man is approached in the same way. Hoffman knows a woman at work who can read his mind (she accepts an invitation to dinner that's on his mind but unspoken). When Billy encounters this same woman naked in their apartment, it's just made into a joke. I know children who reject their mother's male friends with tactics like neglecting to call her to the phone to changing the lock on the front door or calling the police to get them out of the house. The film doesn't begin to touch on the complexities of relationships in and outside the family.

What is ostensibly being called into question by showing a male as a single parent is the assumption that the only real mother is a biological mother or that women are ideally suited to be housewives for the biological reason that they are the ones that bear children. Hoffman gives an excellent argument against this position during the film's custody trial scenes.

It's proof of the film's liberalism that even when motherhood is threatened by Hoffman's advances into domestic space, the mother-child relationship remains an unassailable, ahistorical object. The film opens with a tender shot of Streep and her child against a black background, seemingly floating in timeless space. Part of the case that Streep presents for herself during the custody trial is a simplistic appeal-to-the fact that motherhood is powerfully persuasive as a social institution.

"I'm his mother. He's my child. I love him. He needs me more than he needs his father. I'm his mother."

The simple fact that Streep is the boy's biological mother is supposed to outweigh, in court, any particularities of their individual case. And on the basis of this argument the court grants custody to Streep. As Hoffman's lawyer says, "They went for motherhood right down the line."

Motherhood and the ad world stand up to situations raised by the plot of the film largely because Hoffman is allowed to multiply by dividing in two. He is businessman turned businessman/parent. The structure bears a resemblance to stories of superheroes whose powers are concealed until dire need triggers a metamorphosis. Dustin Hoffman as

Mighty Mouse. That makes Streep into Sue Storm, The Invisible Girl.

The institution of the family fares as well as motherhood and the business world, but Joanna Kramer does not. Hoffman has come to occupy the place of the mother in the domestic sphere, so Streep is expendable as far as the family is concerned. But her actions directly imply a negation of the traditional family structure, so an ambiguous position in the family is reached by demolishing Streep's character.

The reason Streep leaves the family is to attain some measure of purpose and competence in the world; she wants to fulfill herself. This would seem to be in keeping with the stated purpose of the nuclear family — it is, after all, the source of emotional and psychological development for individual egos.

The myth of the family is supported by the cult of the individual (and vice versa). One frequently heard argument says that if not for the family, where else would people grow to become whole, principled, strong individuals? In the first place, this "how else?" argument is just unimaginative. Besides that, it ignores the very thing that every child is supposed to learn inside the family: that is, to the extent that an individual sets itself in opposition to the group to which it belongs, it is wrong, bad, faulty, crazy. A family supports its members as long as they buy into the family line.

"Nurturance" translates into the mother's role of caring for, tending to, feeding, and keeping. So families do not nurture anyone, women who are mothers do. And no one nurtures mothers; the role itself satisfies women, as the myth has it. Balanced against this is the "socialization" role of the family. "Socialization" is the academic euphemism for the psychological and emotional manipulation that intimidates children into thinking and behaving conventionally.

Thus the contradiction in the myth holds that the family both nurtures (through the woman who is the mother) and does not nurture family members (through socialization and because the mother is not cared for). When Streep is shown leaving the family, it is in response to this contradiction in her family. Instead of explicitly confronting this contradiction, the film contains it. In order to uphold the cult of the individual, *KRAMER VS. KRAMER* puts any problems encountered in institutions directly onto the shoulders of individual characters. The business world remains ultimately unscathed while Hoffman is booted out of it. The domestic scene remains a site of serenity because it still looks like the warm hearth, even without the warm breast.

Apparently criticized by the film, the institution of the family is really protectively upheld even in its fracturing. Each individual family member takes the blame for the breakup onto his or her own shoulders. The child asks, "Did Mommy leave because I was bad?" Hoffman answers, "The reason Mommy couldn't stay was she couldn't stand me, Billy. She didn't leave because of you; she left because of me."

"I thought that any time I was happy she was happy but underneath she was very sad. And she tried to talk to me about it, see, but I wasn't listening because I was too wrapped up, just thinking about myself."

Hoffman doesn't even blame his job for keeping him too occupied. Likewise Streep blames herself. To justify herself when she leaves without her child she says, "I'm no good for him. I'm terrible with him; I have no patience." To Hoffman she says, "It's not you; you just married the wrong person, that's all. And I don't love you anymore."

Looking away from the contradictions that forced Streep out of the family, the film depicts the problem as resolvable in terms of the individuals involved.

The question of the family as an institution is finally reduced to a battle between the two parents over custody of their child. The parents have switched roles so that Hoffman is the representative of domestic space. Streep is depicted as the foreign element that embattles the safe inner world from the outside.

Streep is ultimately demolished as an individual character; she is sacrificed to the institution. Streep herself is shown performing the execution, but first her relationship with her best friend is negated, the appearance of her morality and psychological soundness are eroded and her claim to a position of self-determination is denied. As a result, Hoffman's grossly overdetermined male right to privilege of ownership and position comes across as fitting and neat.

Streep's best friend, Margaret, visits Hoffman a few hours after Streep has left for California. Hoffman asks Margaret, "Did you set my wife up to this?" and says, "It just occurred to me, Margaret, that Joanna and I never had any problems until you and Charlie split up ... Sisterhood!" Margaret's support of Streep is made crystal clear in this conversation. Margaret defends Streep by citing the courage of her decision to leave her family. The film pointedly shows that Hoffman gets no sympathy from Margaret.

Streep leaves the family to find a new place for herself in the world, and Hoffman's comments imply that this move was motivated by a consciousness raised through feminism. When two housewives share their discontent and reach a point of action because of that sharing, it's true that this was historically, and is, feminism in action.

The film defines feminism, then. It establishes a woman-to-woman relationship as a category to contend with. Although the story never does depict a non-domestic, non-maternal woman, the category is acknowledged when Streep leaves the home. Streep writes a letter to Billy that states her case without the hysteria that characterized the leaving home scene. She writes, "I have to find something interesting for myself in the world. Everyone has to and so do I."

But for Streep to leave her child is perhaps the one crime too heinous in the film's terms to explain away by pointing a finger at the guilty individual. So feminism, or at least "sisterhood," is used as a boogeyman in the situation. For whatever reason it's brought up in the first place, it's subsequently handled with a resounding thoroughness and callousness that must indicate the depth of the fear that it provokes.

The feminist implications of Streep's actions and motivations are undermined when Hoffman asks, "How much courage does it take to leave a seven-year-old child?" implying that Streep's feminism is just weakness and selfishness.

Moreover, when Streep leaves she is on the verge of an hysterical binge, an emotional breakdown of some sort. Here she becomes what family therapists call the "identified patient" of the Kramer household. Having one crazy person in the house masks the culpability of the whole family as a system of neurotic interdependencies. Streep's solution is to go to California to find herself. What she finds in California is a therapist — "a good one" — and good feelings about herself. Ego strength. This implies that Streep isn't a sister at all; she's just neurotic. A political, feminist response to the family situation is replaced by the opposite of that — an emotional, psychological interpretation of the problem.

Next Margaret is used as a Benedict Arnold. In the course of occupying Streep's place in the domestic sphere, Hoffman also colonizes her position as Margaret's best friend. There is not a scene in the movie that includes a conversation between the two women friends. But Hoffman and Margaret enjoy relaxed intimacy, and they share the experiences of single parenthood. By the end of the film Margaret is talking about getting back together with her husband.

Margaret has become so affiliated with the camp against Streep by the end of the film that it seems natural for her to testify in Hoffman's behalf at the custody trial. Margaret speaks above the sound of the judge's voice and gavel to tell Streep, "If you could see them (the boy and Hoffman) together, maybe you wouldn't be here today." Well, what I saw of them together did not convince me that Hoffman is the undoubtedly better parent. Margaret's testimony represents the theft of a vaguely feminist voice to assert a patriarchal reclaiming of "motherly" virtues for men.

At the same time, the judge tries to prevent her from saying it. The audience is invited to attend to either of two conflicting positions: the judge maintains fairness, openness to Streep while Margaret advocates Hoffman's position.

Even though Streep's solution to her frustration in the home is to find a headshrinker — a good one" — who assures her that she's a fine person, that whatever the problem was, "it's not you," the film's overwhelming visual effect gives the opposite impression that "it" is indeed Streep and nothing else.

The visual treatment of Streep intercepts audience identification with the character. Streep is segregated and eerie, and twice her eeriness is used to foreshadow a disaster. She is shown peering out of a window (she spies on her son at school through a coffee shop window) and in the following scene, Billy falls and hurts himself on the playground. She's shown another time at the window, looking like a life-sized, mechanical, fortune teller at a fair booth. The shot is followed by a phone call to Hoffman from his lawyer, telling him that Streep wants to see the boy. Neither the phone call nor the playground accident would seem quite as serious in another context; the strange sight of an ex-mother posed mysteriously in a dark window juxtaposed to the "disasters" gives them their ominous quality. The disasters echo back to implicate Streep, to reinforce her witchlike quality. When Streep is waiting for Hoffman to meet her in a restaurant, the camera zooms in on her figure, which is made to look strangely still against the busy restaurant background. It is quite necessary for the very believability of later events that the audience not identify with the mother.

Phallogocentric compositions segregate Streep from the spaces within the film where most of the action takes place, as well as from audience identification. An upper, male-dominated domain is created when the camera pans up the sides of skyscrapers. The action takes place on the very top floors of these phallic monsters (the Kramers' apartment building and both of Hoffman's office buildings). Hoffman and the boy occupy the lofty space that's created with slow pans up the sides of skyscrapers followed by cuts to the interiors of the buildings.

All but two of Streep's scenes take place on the ground floors of buildings or outdoors on the ground. One exception is the scene of Streep leaving home. But here she's an hysterical mess, so the figure is too weak to pose any threat. Besides, it must be made graphically clear who exactly left whom, in order for Streep to be used as a scapegoat in the situation. Meanwhile, as Streep is pushed visually out of the home, the depth of field of shots showing Hoffman in the kitchen increases as the movie progresses, showing him to be more and more entrenched in domestic space.

The other time Streep is shown on an upper floor is in the courtroom. The opening shot of this sequence angles down on Streep as she enters an arched doorway. She clutches herself with her arms held tightly in front of her. Then we look up at Hoffman — way up. He's perched at the top of three flights of stairs. The angle of this shot is so severe that he looks in danger of falling through the front plane of the composition. The juxtaposition of these two shots establishes Streep's moral and emotional smallness in contrast to Hoffman's moral righteousness and emotional vulnerability.

Streep's guilt for the family problems is only implied when she is visually ostracized. Her guilt is made more explicit during the courtroom scene, and here the camera's gaze is used to create a sense of punishment. The camera cuts in closer and closer on Streep as she and

Margaret and Hoffman are being questioned. Streep's cool face turns, she looks way over her shoulder more than once, and the effect is of her squirming to get out from under the camera's gaze as it closes in on her. The implication of her guilt is intensified to the point that if we were identifying with the mother the scene would be psychologically punishing to watch.

But all our hope lies with Hoffman and none with Streep at this point in the story. Where has Streep been? What job has she gotten after being out of the job market all her married years? Is she as dedicated and self-confident as Hoffman? Does she resist when she is not taken seriously as a professional because she is a woman? Would she handle the dual role of parent and professional any better than Hoffman does?

These questions are not taken into consideration by the plot of the movie, so the asymmetrical treatment of Hoffman and Streep passes unnoticed. The asymmetry is not just visual. The two are questioned on very different grounds, with very different results. This is where the lack of audience identification with the mother begins to bear fruit.

Hoffman is attacked because he lost his job and because Billy had that accident on the playground while in his care. Streep is attacked for her sexual history and because of her employment history and because her marriage ended in divorce. Hoffman's lawyer says things like, "I would like to ask whether this model of stability and respectability has ever accomplished anything." He attacks Streep in a vicious, sexist manner, yet Streep ends up apologizing to Hoffman for the conduct of her own lawyer. Hoffman's lawyer makes some clever, sarcastic remark at Streep's expense, and the audience laughs out loud. The lawyer asks over and over, "Were you a failure at the one most important relationship in your life? Were you?" Streep looks over to Hoffman for absolution. Hoffman nods no; magnanimous little big man, marathon man, president's man, he clears her of the charge. Then Streep nods, she agrees, yes, she was a failure in the marriage. So much for her ego strength. So much for feminism. The mother's voice is used in her own prosecution.

There would be no way to pass this scene off as anything but an absurd injustice to the mother, except for the way the lines of identification and affiliation have been drawn throughout the film. Even this action in court is intercut with scenes of Hoffman and the boy together, just to remind us of who belongs with whom.

But then the court grants custody to Streep. Hoffman is shown depressed by the news but not rebellious. He explains the decision to his son without rancor or bitterness, in a heart-wrenching scene.

But then again Streep hands the child back to Hoffman. When coming to pick up Billy on the day decreed by the court, Streep calls Hoffman downstairs to the lobby of the apartment. She tells him she's decided that the child's home is here, in their old apartment, here with Hoffman. Here the phallogentrism of those pans up the sides of skyscrapers bear

fruit. Streep refers to the decor of the boy's bedroom, saying how he really belongs in that bedroom, in that apartment. The physical configurations of domestic space have been visually elided with the father and son relationship.

This surprise twist in the plot duplicates the effect achieved in the courtroom when the mother's character is distorted to the point that she votes against herself. Just as Hoffman absolves Streep while she is on the stand, so also the court acquiesces to her argument that she is the child's rightful parent. And just as the mother's voice is used to seal her own culpability in the matter of their divorce, her depicted behavior at the film's close affirms her disenfranchisement in the face of Hoffman's cinematically overdetermined privilege of ownership of their child. She appears to have a powerful voice of her own, but in the end the mother's voice is entirely circumscribed and co-opted by the patriarchal structure that surrounds her.

In an unmotivated and unexplained action, Streep simply surrenders. As a reward for doing this, she can seek and get Hoffman's approval as a "traditional woman," i.e., about her looks. She asks him, "How do I look?" He says. "Beautiful!" She steps into the elevator that will bear her back up into the privileged world of the nuclear family.

Ambiguity is maintained to the last moment but only at the expense of Streep's character. Does she intend to rejoin her family? Will she leave? Each interpretation of the ending is open to the audience depending on what stake they may have in a similar situation.

The film's double meanings can always be traced to what is familiar and conventional in our society, to what will reinforce the audience's position in relation to the subject matter. The film is meant to titillate by creeping to the edge of a dangerous cliff while at the same time providing covert security.

KRAMER VS KRAMER's popularity may be explained by how delicately it deals with emotionally volatile family situations. The film is effective because emotions are provoked but not in a threatening way. Many issues are simply trivialized or caricatured or the audience is given depictions of issues that allow for more than one interpretation. So the audience can fantasize themselves into familiar and significant situations with no danger of the situation suddenly and permanently turning against them. Men and women with a powerful personal stake in either very traditional or very nontraditional roles may insert themselves into the film because of the ambiguity that is structured into it.

The one group that the film does not concede to is single mothers. Single mothers should be incensed by the injustice done to the difficulty of their position by the trivial way that Hoffman's single-parent problems are dealt with.

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### Race relations in *Blue Collar*

by Michael Omi

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Over a decade after the "Great Rebellion" and the emergence of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers dramatically demonstrated the response of black people in Detroit to the pervasiveness of racism in every facet of their work and everyday lives, *BLUE COLLAR* presents us with a surprisingly different vision of contemporary race relations than we might have imagined. As the film unfolds, we are initially struck by the absence of racial conflict. Things somehow have miraculously improved if the close, affectionate relationship between three autoworkers — Smokey (Yaphet Kotto) and Zeke (Richard Pryor), who are black, and Jerry (Harvey Keitel), who is white—is any indication of the new racial climate.

The setting for *BLUE COLLAR*, the automobile factory, has been traditionally regarded as the classical locus of capital-labor relations. Viewed by leftists as a prime arena for "point of production" organizing, it was also the site of nationalist movements in the late sixties given its racially segregated departments." [1] The plant was indeed the plantation; it was a microcosm of U.S. race relations. Black workers were confined to the dirtiest, most dangerous, and most physically demanding jobs in the foundry, body shop, and engine assembly departments. Black and white workers were structurally separated at the workplace. They shared little of a common consciousness and culture and increasingly pursued different political agendas in union halls and city council meetings. Although black demands and Affirmative Action directives over the last ten years have mitigated the more striking examples of the racial division of labor, much remains the same.

The plant and race relations in *BLUE COLLAR* give us quite a different picture. The glimpses of the assembly line we are treated to show that blacks are fully integrated into the various departments in the plant.

Given that blacks are no longer strictly confined to select job categories, nor segregated from whites, we would suspect that blacks and whites would display some camaraderie on the job. After all, for years prominent social psychologists have been saying that racial prejudice

will subside as people are exposed to colleagues from different racial groups at work. But while white workers may have accepted racial cooperation and integration on the shop floor, their consciousness has often not extended to efforts to achieve racial equality on a number of social issues ranging from the integration of schools and neighborhoods to equal protection under the law. In addition to this, given patterns of segregated housing, different social communities (i.e., extended kin relations and ethnic ties), and a different range of leisure and recreational activities, we would expect that there would be little socializing outside the workplace. But in BLUE COLLAR the protagonists drink at the same bar together, their families bowl together, and they get "loaded" and have sex with women together.

The latter activity deserves some note. The film's attempt to provide what seems like obligatory sexual titillation in director/writer Paul Schrader's notorious manner of objectifying women [2] is wielded in service of demonstrating just how integrated these guys really are. After drinking, smoking dope, and snorting coke, more recreational playthings are taken on in the form of a racially mixed group of women. Racism and sexism have historically been intertwined in the U.S., complexly connected through the notion of human beings as property. The ideological result has been the objectification of sex and race with distinct qualities and temperaments being - ascribed to racial/sexual groups (e.g., black men, white women, Asian women, etc.). Both Eldridge Cleaver [3] and Shulamith Firestone, [4] from different political perspectives (black nationalism and radical feminism, respectively) have commented on the emotionally explosive relations engendered by these perceptions. A particularly volatile issue for black and white men has been interracial sexual relations and access to "each other's" women. In BLUE COLLAR, however, there isn't a hint of tension as Smokey, playing the "black stud" stereotype to the hilt, demonstrates some sexual acrobatics with a white woman while Jerry proceeds to have sex with a black woman. In a society where sexual relations are heavily tinged with racism, neither is the least fazed by the other's activity. [5]

Aside from racial integration on the "line" and the presence of black/white primary relations, BLUE COLLAR offers interesting visions of racial accommodation in the cultural realm. To some degree the film suggests that blacks have increasingly been assimilated into the fabric of mass culture and that cultural contradictions are flattened. All the glimpses of primetime TV in BLUE COLLAR feature scenes from programs about blacks, THE JEFFERSONS and GOOD TIMES. Yet the seemingly progressive aspect of the increased presence of blacks on TV is tempered by clips which illustrate how stereotypic and unreal these black roles are. In spite of this, the shows appear to entertain both the black and white households involved.

In the interracial bar where the workers recuperate, Zeke can tolerate country and western music so long as its "hillbilly" aficionado doesn't overdo it. The jukebox comes to personify this tenuous accommodation

in its ability to spew out both country and soul. While cultural contradictions, one basis for racial antagonisms, have not been obliterated, we came away feeling that they have been significantly muted.

Race relations could have been dramatically and effectively treated in a film which deals with such powerful theses as the labor/management conflict and working-class life. Yet despite the potential of the material which Schrader rallied together, he opted for an easy device, the heist-caper format, to create a sense of suspense and drama. The protagonists, wallowing in a sea of debts from gambling (Smokey) or in order to provide necessities and a modicum of conspicuous commodities for their families (Zeke and Jerry), decide to rob the safe in the union hall. Fortified by the rationale that the money is "theirs anyway" and incensed by the apathy of the union leadership to their concerns, they engage in a comical heist. Their egos as thieves are quickly deflated, however, when they discover virtually no money in the safe. What they do find is a record book which chronicles the misuse of union funds. The trio tries to blackmail the union into paying them for the return of the book. The results are tragic and disastrous. They are naive to the cruel machinations of the union leader, a 1930s militant gone corrupt. Smokey, considered the militant "bad nigger" who will never acquiesce to authority, is killed; Zeke is bought off with a union rep position; and Jerry is nearly murdered and seeks solace in the unlikely arms of the FBI.

While raising intriguing themes about race relations throughout the fabric of the story, the film's eventual conclusions are muddled. This seems the result of Schrader's inability to really deal with the subject, in a coherent fashion. The film's insights seem unintended and unconscious, occurring behind Schrader's back. Up until the end, he has painted a picture of racial harmony which was at worst a tolerant accommodation of racial and cultural differences. This entire portrait is violently shattered in the ending sequence with Zeke and Jerry shouting racial epithets at each other — underscored by the frozen frame of them poised to inflict violence on one another.

The terms "honky" and "nigger" which are heatedly exchanged ironically put us on more familiar ground. Our "common sense" tells us that even in the best of situations, when the chips are down and antagonisms flare, racial distinctions immediately come to the fore. But is this immediate reaction a convincing one? Could we just as easily conclude that these attacks couched in racial slurs are not racist attacks but reflect the distinct paths Zeke and Jerry have chosen? Perhaps because of the two men's past affection for each other, racial slurs seem the most personal way to attack and hurt each other. The division and distance between them at the end cannot be articulated in any available terms. They slide around their new allegiance to two opposing camps (the union and the FBI) by using convenient racial vocabulary which helps to situate them in more familiar camps (blacks and whites).

What does all this suggest about racism in the present period? First of all, the movie leads us to believe that the material basis of racism (as reflected in people's location in the productive process of an auto assembly plant) has been obliterated; second, that cultural contradictions have been accommodated; and last, that black/white relations within the working class are harmonious. Within this context, the ending didactically conveys a popular perspective on racism within liberal and left circles. It reveals that racism is a form of *false consciousness* — a form which in fact the working class itself knows to be false.

Since there appears to be no objective basis for racism, one interpretation would focus its appearance on the prejudices of individual workers. Here we end up with the stock liberal notion of racism as the collective term for individual prejudicial sentiments which are founded on misconceptions and antiquated ideas and expressed through individual acts. A possible Marxist diagnosis of the film would interpret Smokey's observation of how "they" divide "us" as the divide-and-conquer strategy of monopoly capitalists and trade union bureaucrats who seek to exploit race as a means to prevent the emergence of working-class consciousness. [6] But the ending makes us suspicious about either of these interpretations with the realization that perhaps the workers themselves realize that racial slurs are merely expressions of differences which are not racial in character. The use of racial terms is only the most convenient and quick means to hurt one another.

BLUE COLLAR is not without its complexity (or inconsistency). The film imagines the working class to be integrated but suggests that racism is operative outside of its class boundaries. The union leadership, while continually evoking its historical struggle to integrate the industry, is essentially white. Similarly, management representatives, in those rare instances in the film where management is seen, are white. It appears as if racial barriers are preventing blacks from entering into upper-level, managerial positions. Zeke's decision to submit to the offers of the union leadership is premised on the belief that institutional racism will not allow him another shot at upward mobility nor will it guarantee him safe protection by the police should he inform on the union's corruption. Zeke's entry might suggest a break with the "old" patterns, but even he remains unconvinced about his effectiveness in changing things. He has been politically neutralized by the union leadership; it's the classic case of co-optation.

Since BIRTH OF A NATION, a film which popularized an interpretation of Reconstruction and standardized a paranoid vision of blacks, countless films have explicitly or implicitly dealt with race relations in the US. Some have presented stereotypic perceptions concocted from white racist fantasies while others have offered realistic and penetrating portraits of race relations which have sensitized audiences to the existence and inhumanity of racism. With its contradictions, BLUE COLLAR has revealing things to say about the way in which race

relations are perceived today. The film offers an insightful glimpse of the workplace, presents a vision of working-class life, and stars two blacks and one white, a nice break from Hollywood's prescription for racial ratios. [7] BLUE DOLLAR also serves up a spectrum of black personalities — the conservative, "Uncle Tomish," older black worker, the family-oriented, feisty Zeke, and the "badass" Smokey — as opposed to the one-dimensional, monolithic group of blacks we get in most films. Most refreshing is the portrayal of blacks as working people, not as the cinematic lumpen-proletariat that occasionally, as in SUPERFLY, rises to glamorous heights.

Despite all these elements in its favor, BLUE COLLAR offers us a superficial vision of race relations which portrays the working class as objectively integrated. Racism when it rears its ugly head is the expression of truly *false* consciousness. This vision is a false one. It is one unfortunately shared by segments of the left who believe racism to be merely an ideological fixture which hinders white workers from seeing that their objective interests are similar to those of racial minority workers. In practice, the raising of "class" demands has often meant the submersion of antiracist demands. [8]

If BLUE COLLAR offers us a false and contradictory vision of race relations, part of the reason lies with the confusing and contradictory nature of contemporary race relations. In the last decade, the industrial sector has changed and capital-labor struggles have affected race relations dramatically, Affirmative Action programs, the displacement of labor through technological innovations, the recomposition of the labor force, and capital flight from inner cities as well as from the U.S. itself have all profoundly altered the nature of race relations.

Race relations are rapidly approaching a critical period. In the wake of the Weber decision, scores of suits brought forth from the private and public sectors illustrate that the right to equal access for jobs and redress for past racial discrimination are still problematic. The riot in the Liberty City ghetto of Miami testifies to the existence of a split society, one in which the black underclass feels brutalized by state institutions while it slips increasingly into impoverishment. Their anger and frustration, coupled with the new mood of "social meanness" among broad sectors of the population, threaten to divide the races more sharply than the racial confrontations of the sixties.

Racism has always been the monster lurking in the belly of the auto industry. In the twenties, Henry Ford wooed black community leaders to convince blacks to act as strikebreakers. The 1940s witnessed the UAW (United Auto Workers) leadership breaking wildcat strikes which were organized by white workers to prevent black workers from entering the industry. In the 1960s, the emergence of DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) and subsequent RUMs pointed to the necessity of organizing black workers around the issue of racism in the plants, the union halls, and the community. New currents in the auto industry threaten to exacerbate problems. The energy crisis, foreign competition,

declining domestic sales, and technological innovations conspire to spell massive layoffs and broad changes in productive relations.

This legacy and what looms on the horizon are unfortunately ignored in favor of a rather shallow and confusing portrait of race relations in *BLUE COLLAR*. The film's conclusion breeds cynicism and a fatalistic mistrust of collective action which is served up under the thin political veil of racism as a divisive tactic — an ideological weapon which disguises the real enemy and sets us against our allies. Smokey's voice reiterates an earlier observation over the final frame:

"They pit the lifers against the new boys, the old against the young, the black against the white, to keep us in our place."

The overall effect on the audience is chilling. The statement seem like such a truism that we tend to greet it with a weary nod and some pondering as to who Schrader thinks "they" are. A better question may be how do "they" do it? Hollywood may be rediscovering the working class, but it doesn't have an inkling about the conflicts and divisions within it. They extend beyond mere name-calling.

## Notes

[1.](#) The political struggles of black auto workers are intriguingly chronicled in Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Mind Dying* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).

[2.](#) The women characters are little more than ciphers in *BLUE COLLAR*. They are either one-dimensional inducers of guilt (the wives) or givers of sexual pleasure (the playmates).

[3.](#) Eldridge Cleaver, "The Primeval Mitosis," in *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1968).

[4.](#) Shulamith Firestone, "Racism: The Sexism of the Family of Man," in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

[5.](#) I think this aspect of the scene was most striking although Schrader's intent was probably to illustrate that the family itself was no longer a haven or refuge but a source of tension and guilt. This necessitated the occasional "boys' night out."

[6.](#) Most left critics of the film have not challenged either of these perspectives. See "BLUE COLLAR: Detroit Moviegoers Have Their Say." *Cineaste* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1978).

[7.](#) When Schrader was presenting a description of the main characters, one movie exec corrected him by saying, "You mean, two white and one black." Interview with Paul Schrader, *Seven Days* (7 April 1978).

[8.](#) Noel Ignatin, "Black Workers, White Workers," *Radical America* 8, no. 4 (July/August 1974).

[9.](#) Al Auster et al., "Hollywood and the Working Class: A Discussion,"  
*Socialist Review* 4-6 (July/August 1979).

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### *The Shootist* Redemption of discredited authority

by Steven Albert

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Because of the strong wave of public sentiment that surrounded John Wayne's death, *THE SHOOTIST*, Wayne's final film, looks very different today than it did five years ago when it was first released. For better or worse, all viewings of the film in the next few years will be weighted in the public's mind with the pathos of hindsight — with the knowledge that life imitated art (the film centers around the last days of a gunman dying of cancer) and at the same time that life was finally indifferent to art (the film reprieves its hero from precisely the slow, lingering death that Wayne actually suffered). *THE SHOOTIST*, however, functioned in a very different — and now largely forgotten — set of contexts at the time of its original appearance. The first aim of this article will be to recover, for the record, what these contexts were and to establish how they helped to shape the film when it was made five years ago. The second aim will be to use *THE SHOOTIST* as an object lesson in the basic procedures and strategies of defensively didactic narrative. The third aim will be to relate the use of these narrative procedures to what this article refers to as the fundamentalist imagination.

The John Wayne I discuss in this article is not the private individual who died in 1978 but his screen persona that survives him. This article deals with the uses of a cultural icon, not the actions of a human being. In a just analysis of any actor's work and of the cultural values he/she (at times quite unintentionally) becomes associated with, such a distinction is always essential. In the case of John Wayne, however, it is crucial because Wayne's relation to his public image was in fact often quite ambivalent.

Now that Wayne has been effectively canonized by death, it is easy to forget that when *THE SHOOTIST* first appeared Wayne's popularity had been declining steadily for practically a decade. Although Wayne's films from the 40s and 50s remained very popular on television during this period, where they ran almost perpetually, Wayne's performance *at the box office* continued to decline. According to *Variety* tabulations, half of

the thirty-one films Wayne made between 1950 and 1965, when he was the Number 1 Male Box Office Star in America, grossed in the \$4 to \$8 million range. This represented tremendous earnings in the 50s. In the period 1966-1976 [that is, during the height of the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandals], Wayne's films continued to gross in the same \$4 to \$8 million range, but in the inflated market of the 70s this represented poor to mediocre earnings. *THE HIGH AND THE MIGHTY*, 1954, and *THE SHOOTIST*, 1976, both earned \$6 million, but that figure represented *three times* as many separate admissions in 1954 as it did in 1976. This decline in the number of admissions sold does not, moreover, reflect a general decline in audience attendance. In the period 1971-1977, Clint Eastwood's films, which used similar narrative formulas and played to essentially the same audience, consistently outgrossed those of Wayne, sometimes by as much as 300%.

It would be simplistic to suggest that Wayne's support of the Vietnam War in his private life was the only or even the determining factor in this record of box office decline, but it was an important one. Wayne was certainly the object of a great deal of criticism and hostility during and after the Vietnam period and his screen persona, guilty by association with the war, became increasingly politicized with every passing year.

Wayne's two greatest successes in this period, *THE GREEN BERETS* and *TRUE GRIT*, each in their own way addressed and reflected the controversy that continued to surround him. *THE GREEN BERETS* was an attempt to meet the antiwar critics head-on. It was Wayne's first *overtly* political film since *BLOOD ALLEY* in 1955; that is, it addressed a contemporary situation and its politics were not displaced into the nineteenth century. It grossed \$10 million in 1968, more than any other Wayne film ever grossed except *TRUE GRIT*, which won him an Oscar the next year and grossed \$14 million. (But, in perspective, in the same two years, *THE GRADUATE* and *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDSANCE KID* grossed \$50 million each.) Wayne took such a beating over *THE GREEN BERETS* from both film critics and liberals that *TRUE GRIT*'s success with both these groups the following year seems almost miraculous.

However, the same strategy was at work in this case that had earlier salvaged the careers of both Marlene Dietrich and Katherine Hepburn when they too had been rejected by the public. In *TRUE GRIT* Wayne saved himself by giving a self-mocking performance in which he surrendered every vestige of his dignity, thus proving himself a good sport, surprisingly able to poke fun at his own inflated and now highly politicized image. That is, by publicly humiliating himself — as Marlene Dietrich had done when she took part in a in a saloon brawl in *DESTROY RIDES AGAIN* and as Katherine Hepburn had done when Cary Grant socked her in the jaw in the first minute of *THE PHILADELPHIA STORY* — Wayne "atoned" for all his "sins" and won forgiveness from the public *by no longer asking to be taken seriously*.

In *THE SHOOTIST*, however, we see the Wayne persona become

suddenly serious again. The film turns abruptly away from the good-natured self-caricature that had governed most of Wayne's films in the early 70s in favor of a kind of tragic Lear-like pathos that marks a return — one might almost say a regression — to a mood and feeling that had not been associated with Wayne since the Ford westerns of the early 60s. At the time of its release the film was frankly understood as a swan song, the intention of which was to rehabilitate and canonize its star. Though ultimately the film did only average business (\$6 million), it was Wayne's first success with the critics in seven years and a modest hit with the sophisticated audience in New York. The film's considerable prestige, regardless of its actual earnings, did succeed in making Wayne respectable again. But why had the Wayne persona suddenly turned serious — indeed almost funereal? Why the abrupt retreat from comedy and the desire for redemption? The answer is that in *THE SHOOTIST*, for the first time since *THE GREEN BERETS*, the Wayne persona was appropriated in the service of a matter considerably more urgent to its makers than the mere vicissitudes of John Wayne's screen career.

*THE SHOOTIST* was released in 1976, the bicentennial year, at a time when the "John Wayne" brand of patriarchal heroism, already seriously compromised by Vietnam, had been finally disgraced entirely by the Watergate affair. I don't think there is any question that a significant relation exists between the forced resignation of the president from office in August 1974, the publication in January 1975 (less than six months later) of Glendon Swarthout's novel *THE SHOOTIST*, and the filming of this novel by Don Siegel and John Wayne for release in the final quarter of the bicentennial. This does not mean that the film should be construed as an allegory about Watergate or that J. B. Books, the outlaw hero of the film, was consciously intended as a surrogate for Nixon. Nor is Queen Victoria, whose death is announced to the hero in the story's second scene, meant to be a surrogate for Nixon. On the contrary, as a monarch who reigned more than half a century and who was still greatly loved by her subjects when she died. Victoria was everything Nixon was not. That was precisely the point. In 1975, the powerful saw Nixon as the man whose public humiliation and disgrace had cast a shadow over *all* authority, and no western could address the crisis of John Wayne's status in the bicentennial year without at the same time addressing what the Right, at the time, perceived to be wholesale crisis in authority throughout the United States, if not indeed throughout the world. This is so because "John Wayne" in 1976 was the very embodiment of distressed authority in the United States. Perhaps in the 40s it was still possible to view Wayne only in the guise of a heroic male demigod, but by the 70s Wayne, whether willingly or not, had practically become the patriarchy in the flesh. Thus any criticism of John Wayne, whether of the man or the persona, attacked and threatened the entire worldview of the Right.

I will argue in this article that *THE SHOOTIST* met this crisis by trying to rehumanize the archetype of patriarchal heroism that J.B. Books and Wayne personified in the hope that if Wayne became more likable again, patriarchal heroism would become respectable again. Through the

redemption of "John Wayne," *THE SHOOTIST* tried to resurrect the honor and the dignity of all discredited authority, which had been very seriously wounded by the blunders of a fallen president.

This intention — and this hope — is most noticeable in the way the film transforms the ending of the Glendon Swarthout novel. In the novel, Books' death is handled like -a crucifixion drenched in tragic pathos. In the film, his death is pregnant with apotheosis and redemption. The novel, having been produced much more closely in time to the "tragedy" of Nixon's fall, is morbid and self-pitying. A year later, however, in the film the Right has found its second wind.

## TWO ENDINGS

In the opening sequence of *THE SHOOTIST*, J.B. Books (John Wayne), an aging gunman notorious for having shot down thirty men, rides out of the mountains and into town and learns from Dr. Hostetler (James Stewart) that he is dying of cancer and has less than six weeks to live. Books then takes up lodgings in the local boarding house of Mrs. Rogers (Lauren Bacall), a respectable bourgeois widow, and prepares to meet his death. The remainder of the film depicts the various ways in which the town reacts to Books's presence (he is viewed as both pariah and celebrity). It shows his hot-and-cold relationship with the Widow Rogers (who has moral qualms about his reputation and his moral code but who, in the end, comes to accept Books on his own terms). And we see his rehabilitation of her young son Gilliom (Ron Howard), whom Books snatches from the evil influence of a local ne'er-do-well.

After being subjected to a variety of insensitive efforts to exploit his notoriety for profit — by, among others, a journalist, an ex-fiancée (Sheree North), and an undertaker (John Carradine) — Books learns that his death will be both agonizing and undignified. "If I had your courage," the doctor tells him, implicitly suggesting suicide, "I would not die a death such as I have just described." But Books repudiates the idea of suicide. Finally resolving to die as he has lived, with both guns smoking, he invites the town's three villains to a shootout. The four men meet in the gaudy opulence of the town casino on the afternoon of Books' birthday (a sentimental touch added by the film). In the ensuing battle Books sustains gunshot wounds but manages to kill all three of his antagonists. At this point the novel and the film version of *THE SHOOTIST* diverge from one another drastically.

In the film, the rehabilitated Gilliom runs into the saloon just in time to see the bartender suddenly jump out from hiding and shoot Books in the back, thus cheating Books of his final moment of redemption. At once Gilliom takes up the fallen outlaw's gun and shoots the bartender dead, thus avenging Books' honor. For a tense moment the boy stands there, holding the gun in his hand (he has greatly coveted this gun throughout the film). Then suddenly he throws the gun away. Books sees him do this and dies silently and happily. The sense is that Books has taught the boy well, that in this final act Gilliom has graduated and become a man.

In the novel, on the other hand, Gilliom (whom Books has *failed* to rehabilitate) does not come in until *after* the bartender has shot Books. Moreover, in the novel the bartender's gunshot blast, unlike that in the film, is not fatal; it merely incapacitates Books, leaving him helpless and in agony. Books is then made to suffer the final indignity of having to beg Gilliom (who detests him and who has only come to steal his guns) to put him out of his misery, as one would a horse. Gilliom obliges Books sadistically and then walks off with Books' guns, exultant.

"That was my idea, my little 'director's touch,'" Wayne admitted in an interview (*The Advocate*, September 22, 1976). The change in the ending represents

"my wish that this man have some reason — that there is some reason for this picture ... and I think it's done through our guidance and example for this kid ... I put this kid on the spot to make him realize that my life is not the best for a man to lead."

The emotional tone of the film at the decisive moment when Gilliom rejects the outlaw's gun is so elegant and so lyrical that it is impossible for the audience to *think* about what it has just been shown. It is certainly true that Gilliom has learned from Books to turn from violence as a way of life. But this does not mean that Books, through Gilliom, has repudiated the violence of his own life, nor does THE SHOOTIST urge every hawk to turn into a dove. On the contrary, the audience, through Gilliom, is simply being told to go about its business and to take no further interest in the actions of the powerful. When Gilliom relinquishes the outlaw's gun — the symbol and the instrument of power — he has really learned that he is not entitled to aspire to the general's rank or to take part in shaping policy. In other words, he has been taught his place.

Even more significant, however, Gilliom has also learned the "proper" attitude of sentimental and unquestioning reverence that the Right believes is due to every figure of authority. When Gilliom, in shooting the bartender, comes to Books' aid and avenges Books' honor, which Books can no longer defend for himself, his action is a sentimental gesture grounded in *uncritical* admiration, sympathy, and love. He is propelled by his feelings to step into Books' shoes and to act, on Books' behalf, as Books would act himself if he were able. For the instant, that is, he acts according to Books' code, *which is not supposed to be his own*; then he rejects this code entirely, having at last understood that such a code would be entirely unsuitable for him.

In the novel, the villains, through Gilliom's theft of Books' guns, ultimately win the day; Gilliom is *their* heir, not Books'. However, the triumph of the villains in the novel is cynical only insofar as it reflects certain basic assumptions of the Right about human societies, the most fundamental being that certain groups within society (women, the poor, the young, the heretical, and in particular the rebellious) are innately wicked and thus in need of constant supervision and restriction by their

"betters," who are, in turn, innately competent, innately wise, and (hence) innately powerful. Further, the welfare (indeed the very survival) of society as a whole is seen as depending' entirely on society being organized hierarchically into supervised and supervising classes, with the best (that is, genetically most competent) men at the top. From this logic it follows that any disruption of such a balance of classes (particularly from the bottom) results inevitably and irrevocably in the complete reversion of civilized society to chaos and barbarism, a state of affairs in which (supposedly) not only the powerful but everyone would perish because then the genetically least competent would be, in charge. Essentially, then, the novel's ending represents a right-wing nightmare vision of the state of the union not in the year 1901 in the aftermath of Books' martyrdom but rather in the year 1975 in the aftermath of Nixon's fall, when the controls have been relaxed, and the barbarians are rushing through the gates.

The new ending of the film does not, of course, alter any of the novel's assumptions regarding the fundamental necessity of a rigidly hierarchical society in which the innately superior have charge over the lives of the innately inferior. On the contrary, the film merely effects a restoration of the social controls which the novel had portrayed as having been catastrophically subverted. In this context, Gilliom's rehabilitation and final conversion to the code of middle-class respectability is as central to the film's methods of restoring control as Gilliom's defection to the criminality had been to the novel's vision of class apocalypse. Both novel and film assume that it is not force but rather the self-restraint of the supervised (children, wives, workers, students, psychiatric patients, prisoners, etc.) that provides the most critical element in all social control.

Self-restraint *per se* is not an issue here — restraint would still be needed, even in utopia. The question is what, specifically, must (most) individuals keep from doing in a social order based on hierarchies of dominance? They must refrain from theft — not merely theft of property but, even more essentially, theft of privilege. THE SHOOTIST's worldview, at base, forbids the personal appropriation of authority. That is, we must *all* stay in our place.

#### FUNDAMENTALIST NARRATIVE PROCEDURES

Self-defense is a central theme in THE SHOOTIST, as it is in any western of the Right, yet, peculiarly, Books is never shown in any serious danger from the men he finally exterminates. Indeed, the villains in THE SHOOTIST are so crudely integrated into the scenario that the film's treatment of them seems almost absent-minded. However, Books is menaced constantly throughout the film. The method of THE SHOOTIST in dealing with these menaces involves the basic procedures of all defensively didactic narrative (regardless of originating ideology). These procedures involve

1. dramatically invoking a feared threat or danger so that it can then be ritually exorcized,

2. glorifying an exemplary hero by means of contrast with trivialized, hence devalued, enemies, and
3. presenting (innocently or deliberately) mystified patterns of cause and effect by substituting myth for history.

The most obvious menace Books encounters in *THE SHOOTIST* is the threat of cancer and the prospect of a period of prolonged helplessness leading to a painful and degraded death. I think it would be inappropriate, however, to overemphasize this threat. Books' cancer actually functions in *THE SHOOTIST* in much the same way as FDR's polio functions in *SUNRISE AT CAMPOBELLO*. In both conservative and liberal-minded films, the hero's affliction primarily makes possible a demonstration of the hero's admirable strength of character and skill in overcoming obstacles, and it gives dreadful substance to a threat, which the action of the film ultimately, and triumphantly, neutralizes. In defining this threat it has to be remembered that what is really at stake for distressed authority in *THE SHOOTIST* is not mortality — that is, threatened loss of life — but rather threatened loss of power. In this context it really makes no difference that Books dies, whereas FDR does not. What is important is that Books, ultimately, does not die passively, the victim of a dreaded and *immobilizing* ailment. Rather, by taking matters into his own hands, he takes charge of his death just as he has taken charge of his life. Discharging his guns one final time into the villains at the end, he triumphs over both passivity and "fate," just like FDR, and thereby crowns his life and his authority once more with honor.

In fact, the real menace to the hero of *THE SHOOTIST* comes from neither cancer nor the film's cardboard villains but rather from a whole parade of secondary characters who (a) are hostile to his moral code or (b) attempt to take advantage of him by "improperly" appropriating for themselves the hero's special dispensation to exist outside the law. Books' real enemies in *THE SHOOTIST* are those who step out of their proper place to criticize him or exploit him. The main business of the film is to repudiate their criticism and to punish their presumption.

#### DEVALUING THE HERO'S CRITICS

In both the novel and the film version of *THE SHOOTIST*, Books is visited by an obnoxious young reporter by the name of Dobkins, who wants to write a series of sensational articles on Books' life that will be syndicated coast-to-coast (and at the same time put Dobkins on the map). This is a key scene because it seems to have been put together with the sole intention of discrediting all journalists (newspapers being viewed entirely as institutions that profit from the humiliation of the powerful). In fact, Dobkins seems to be taking the rap in this scene for all the Woodwards and Bernsteins who have ever blown the whistle on establishment iniquity.

Although Dobkins tells the outlaw that he wants to set down the true facts before it is too late (before the last of the great shootists dies), he really wishes to sensationalize the outlaw's life — that is, he has his own

sentimentalized idea of the "true facts." Although uninterested, Books patiently hears Dobkins out. Emboldened by Books' silence, the reporter grows increasingly impertinent. Finally he becomes insulting:

"Then I'll go after the psychological angle. What is the true temperament of the man-killer? Is he the loner that they say? Is he really cool-headed under fire? Is he by nature bloodthirsty? Does he brood after the deed is done? Reproach himself?"

Books turns white with fury. He stands, draws his gun, and inserts it into Dobkins' mouth. He backs the reporter out of the parlor, down the hall, out the front door, and onto the porch. He tells Dobkins to bend down and turn around. Then, while Mrs. Rogers stands protesting at the door, Books kicks the upstart squarely in the ass and sends him packing. (The scene is the same in both the novel and the film.)

The sexual politics of this scene deserve close scrutiny. At the beginning of the scene Dobkins challenges Books' dominance by attempting to penetrate him — not only by insulting him but also by attempting to "probe" deeply into Books' past in order to uncover Books' "secrets" which, in order to advance his own career, he means to use to Books' disadvantage. (Even Dobkins' name is full of penetrating connotations. Dobkins is an anagram for "bodkins," defined by Webster as "a thick blunt needle or a pointed instrument for making holes in cloth." The word originally meant dagger or stiletto.) Books rises to this "challenge to his manhood" and humiliates Dobkins by penetrating him instead — with his gun and his boot — thus ratifying his own dominance and rendering the reporter powerless. This effectively puts Dobkins in his place again.

The phallic connotations of guns and daggers hardly needs to be spelled out — this scene is a duel of penises. The overtones of fellatio and sodomy could not be more explicit; in the book. Dobkins is told to suck on Books's gun. Even more to the point, a stereotype of homosexuality (incorrectly identified with "unmanliness" and "weakness of character") is repeatedly invoked in order to devalue Dobkins. His dress is dandyish, his manner is effete, and his motives are treacherous. He is interested in psychology (the study of the emotions, which only women are supposed to be concerned with) and has apparently projected onto Books sentimentalized ideas about the guilt feelings of outlaws. Moreover, he uses pretentious ten-dollar words like "salubrious" and "extant" which are unsuitably refined for a discourse with a "man" like Books (who, "to his credit," does not understand them). It is of course never explicitly suggested that Dobkins is actually homosexual; nevertheless these signs connote, if not the concept "homosexual" then at least the concept "sissy" (which, of course, amounts to the same thing since for most people who do not know any better these two concepts, very simply, signify each other).

Yet to read homoerotic metaphors into this scene would be to misinterpret the encounter. There is no question of any sexual desire

between Books and Dobkins here; there is only a contest for dominance between male enemies. In fact the operative metaphors are sexist. The sissy stereotype is invoked in order to inscribe Dobkins from the very beginning as one destined for submission. And the simplest, most effective, most "debasing" way of rendering Dobkins powerless, in the context of such sexist thinking, is simply to characterize him as a woman. That is why he is penetrated by Books at the end of the scene. And that is why Bacall is there to protest against (but also to observe) this penetration. Bacall is brought in so that Dobkins can be identified with her as someone who is penetrated (and hence dominated). At the same time that her presence intensifies his degradation because it has been witnessed by a woman, her defense of Dobkins (though she has no idea of what he has done) further stigmatizes him as a mama's boy who needs a woman to protect him. In all these ways is Dobkins (by sexist standards) rendered trivial — and the threat posed by the questions Dobkins raises in his interview with Books is thus effectively defused.

Similar trivializing strategies are employed throughout *THE SHOOTIST* to discredit other characters who challenge, criticize, or fail to show the proper reverence for Books. The undertaker who hopes to profit from Books' death is a senile dandy; the sheriff (Harry Morgan) who insults Books throughout the film is incompetent; the ex-fiancée who visits Books and offers to marry him before he dies is in league with Dobkins and only interested in the book royalties she would receive as Books' widow. On the one hand, all these figures are presented as unworthy, which discredits and neutralizes their criticism. On the other hand, they are all weak-willed; hence Books has little difficulty dominating them — indeed he has only to expose their motives to them and they crumble in his hands. From beginning to end, all the characters Books encounters in *THE SHOOTIST* are shown to be motivated by the same self-interest and opportunism (and come to the same degraded end) as the unfortunate reporter. Only Mrs. Rogers, Books' harshest critic, escapes humiliation. She is allowed to keep her dignity intact and to have strength of character, partly because she and Gilliom are the only characters who do not try to exploit Books, but primarily because she learns to honor Books' code all by herself and therefore functions as the vehicle through which the audience is counseled to concede to the powerful their claims to special privilege and higher truth.

In all these instances *THE SHOOTIST* consistently functions to protect Books from a confrontation with an equal with whom the audience might possibly compare him. By the same token the compassion which the film insists is due the dying Books is not in any way disinterested. It is not advanced as a general humanitarian principle but is rather directed specifically at a stricken authority figure who has been divested through extraordinary circumstances of the privileges he would ordinarily enjoy and which the film believes should be restored to him. *THE SHOOTIST* is opposed, in other words, to the stereotyping and humiliation of heroes but not to the stereotyping and humiliation of sheriffs, undertakers, barbers, journalists, old flames, and adolescent upstarts.

## SUPPRESSING THE HERO'S PAST

The action of *THE SHOOTIST*, like the action of the *Book of Job* (with whom Books is implicitly identified) tests its hero with a series of ordeals, a string of spiritual trials, which he must stoically endure and ultimately rise above. For the most part, these trials involve a series of insensitive intrusions on the privacy of Books' death. These intrusions on the hero's privacy, in turn, are caused by public curiosity regarding Books' (infamous) past. In one way or another and from one motive or another (greed, envy, malice), almost everybody Books encounters wants to know about the thirty men that he is credited with killing. However, they are all denied the facts they seek. Books refuses to discuss his past with anyone.

The film rationalizes Books' reluctance to explain or justify his past by suggesting that from Books' point of view these questions represent invasions of his privacy by people who are undeserving of his confidence. That the characters are all undeserving is, of course, something which the film has carefully arranged. For Books, such questions are impertinent and disrespectful; they prejudge him and he refuses to be judged. And just as he refuses to reveal his history to Dobkins, who is interested only in Books' legend ("I won't be remembered," Books exclaims at one point, "for a pack of lies!"), so also does he rebuff Mrs. Rogers' exhortation to see a preacher before dying. In both instances, the hero refuses to "confess." Confession implies sins which can be pardoned; to ask for pardon is to tacitly admit guilt.

What is at stake here, of course, is not whether Books himself should speak about his past or not (other characters could do this for him if the film desired — in this way his privacy would not be violated) but rather whether the audience is entitled to know about such matters so that it can judge Books for itself. *THE SHOOTIST* takes the clear position that the audience is not entitled to this knowledge because the audience is not (supposed to be) entitled to pass judgment on "John Wayne," J.B. Books, or any other figure of authority. Rather, it is entitled only to revere such figures, on their own terms (as Mrs. Rogers ultimately learns to do), from a respectful distance. And this would not be possible if we were brought up close.

Books' past is none of our business. No matter what he may have done, the film would argue, no matter how his actions have been misinterpreted, his heart, his motives, and his ideology remain above reproach — thus society has wrongly and unjustly censured him *because as a heroic figure of authority he lives above the law*.

It is for this reason that the film keeps hammering away at Books' past. The questions hurled at Books really challenge whether he should have heroic status; by seeking to expose his past, they call into question his integrity, his honor, and his authority. These challenges existed within the culture at large. The questions asked in the film represent questions which America, in 1975, was asking itself about authority-per se. *THE*

SHOOTIST's mission was not to answer these questions but to repel them by denying us the right to ask them. When the film's characters are spurned and silenced, the audience is also spurned and silenced: it is we who have been disrespectful and impertinent.

To some extent, of course, we *are* shown Books' past in THE SHOOTIST. The film's prologue shows a series of brief clips from several John Wayne films in which he has played gunslingers like Books. When THE SHOOTIST was released, most reviewers were puzzled by this prologue or dismissed it as a sentimental tribute to John Wayne's career and legend. No one seemed to notice then the way it also functioned as an invocation of the values and the ideology that Wayne himself personified.

Like the newsreel that opens CITIZEN KANE, the prologue of THE SHOOTIST presents the film's themes and action in miniature. Just as the whole film presents us with a series of thwarted challenges to Books' dominance, so each section of the prologue repeats the same paradigmatic action — an exchange of gunfire between Wayne and an enemy, with Wayne emerging victorious. Each clip bears an advancing date and the clips proceed chronologically through that period of the nineteenth century with which the Hollywood western has primarily concerned itself, roughly 1840-1890. Thus we are shown Wayne/Books during the opening of the frontier, Wayne/Books during the Indian wars, Wayne/Books during the Civil War, Wayne/Books during the building of the railroads, and so on.

The prologue projects U.S. history as entirely a matter of a series of contests for dominance between heroes and villains (that is, between the virtuous and the depraved), and the association of Books (as well as Wayne) with these evocative historical events is meant to persuade us that Books deserves our reverence and gratitude for having fought the battles and won the victories which made the United States the greatest nation in the world. This is nonsense. What the film really invokes here is not the historical reality of the U.S. West in the nineteenth century (about which most of us know next to nothing anyway) but rather the audience's own movie-going past in the twentieth century. We are not looking at biography or history in the prologue; we are looking at the way the West was mythologized by Hollywood in the westerns of the 30s, 40s, and 50s. THE SHOOTIST remembers the values and myths of the pre-Kennedy assassination era with nostalgia, not the values of the nineteenth century. This prologue's intent was to make Bicentennial audiences feel the same nostalgia.

THE SHOOTIST's prologue does not inform us about the past that Books is asked about throughout the film. We see instead Books' and Wayne's legend, which consists of a chain of equally context-less incidents, all more or less identical in nature. Over and over again we see Books the victor but never Books the man. We see archetypal situations, not historical events. But this is, of course, precisely how the past looks to the powerful (indeed, this is how it looks to most of us).

History is not what actually "happened." History is a highly selective fiction, constantly reconstructed in the present to account for the present in order to legitimize or shame it. The writing of history is, by its very nature, a partisan activity. Once absorbed by ideology, history becomes the source of myth. And the crucial issue about myth (the mode not of truth but of desire — or of dread) is not fidelity to fact but rather who has authored it and why.

## THE FUNDAMENTALIST IMAGINATION

THE SHOOTIST's particular vision of society is a function on the one hand of certain assumptions of the conservative Right (specifically, the assumptions surrounding Social Darwinism) and, on the other hand, of a certain cast of mind, which may be called the fundamentalist imagination. It is important to distinguish these two tendencies from one another. Fundamentalism is neither the automatic by product of conservatism nor is it exclusively associated with conservatism. The fundamentalist imagination concerns itself above all with preserving received boundaries between "good" and "evil, as well as with defending certain cultural taboos that guard these boundaries. Essentially a puritanical, authoritarian mode of thought, concerned obsessively with order and with the stamping out of heresy, fundamentalism is canonical in operation rather than investigative: it explains the world by trying to reduce rather than by trying to explore social, psychological, and moral complexity. Its contrary would be dialectical thought. Although we typically associate fundamentalism with the Right, the fundamentalist spirit quite frequently animates both liberal films (as in ROOTS or the films of Costa Gavras, which operate essentially in the service of scandal rather than of historical "truth") and socialist ones (as in MISSION TO MOSCOW, WATCH ON THE RHINE, or THE NORTH STAR). Conservative, liberal, and socialist fundamentalism are certainly grounded in drastically contrasting visions of ideal societies, but the didactic rhetorical and narrative procedures they employ in the service of these different visions are identical.

The "hero vs. villains in a threatened community" narrative paradigm (whether in the war, western, detective, police, spy, monster, or disaster genres), of which THE SHOOTIST is a very typical example, tends to function as a stage upon which conflicts between the almost always contradictory claims of social cohesion and community survival, on the one hand, and individual desire, on the other, are brought out into the open and artificially resolved. (Indeed, the arbitrary artistic resolution of issues seemingly incapable of immediate social resolution is one of the primary — though certainly not the only — cultural functions of narrative; stories are the dreams of culture.) However, the nature and projected meaning of this conflict will be very different, depending upon (a) whether the terms of this conflict have been mediated by the cultural assumptions of the Right or the cultural assumptions of the liberal Left (the socialist Left cannot be said to have any voice today in Hollywood at all) and (b) whether the imagination governing the narrative is fundamentalist or not. THE SHOOTIST has much in common, for

example, with HIGH NOON and SHANE, but the latter films are animated by a very different kind of social vision. Let me clarify with a brief comparison of THE SHOOTIST, an expression of conservative fundamentalism, with HIGH NOON, a non-fundamentalist film from the liberal Left.

In HIGH NOON, Grace Kelly's Quaker principles are shown to be inadequate to Gary Cooper's self-defensive needs in much the same way as Lauren Bacall's lukewarm Christianity in THE SHOOTIST is shown to be inadequate to John Wayne's self-defensive needs. In both films, we have the same pair of contrasted moral systems: the female system emphasizing fairness and compassion, oriented to promote justice; the male system emphasizing righteousness and honor, oriented to promote survival. In both films, moreover, the woman's moral system handicaps the hero in the face of danger. These contrasted moral systems are not inevitably gender-identified by Hollywood: Wayne's survival morality is challenged by Montgomery Clift in RED RIVER and by James Stewart in THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE. HIGH NOON, however, allows Kelly certain actions and responsibilities that THE SHOOTIST forbids Bacall. To put it another way, HIGH NOON trusts Kelly and through her, its audience, in a way that THE SHOOTIST does not trust Bacall and, through her, *its* audience.

The essential issue which divides HIGH NOON and THE SHOOTIST is whether individuals should be encouraged to develop competence in many social roles or only one. That is, *who shall be allowed to act?* The conservative fundamentalism of THE SHOOTIST answers this question by assigning all individuals in society to one, and only one, of a very limited number of social roles, each with its own unique code of conduct and its own (unequal) powers of initiative. The basic roles are

1. respectable law-abiding townspeople,
2. outsider warrior hero (sometimes a maverick law officer), and
3. poacher villain.

In this scheme of strict role specialization, society resembles the social order of the insect world, in which there is essentially a worker caste and a warrior caste (and of course natural enemies) *which are each genetically distinct from one another*. (Only warrior ants have eyes. Worker ants are blind.) These social roles are intended to be fixed forever. Hence, the movement of individuals from one caste to another is not seen as evidence of their superior adaptability and fitness; on the contrary, it is viewed as evidence of poaching and presumption. In THE SHOOTIST Wayne must act alone against the villains — because as the warrior it is his role *and his role alone to do this*. In HIGH NOON Cooper spends almost the entire film going from one person to another asking for their help in facing down the villains. And the refusal of the town to help Cooper is something which HIGH NOON regards as a pathological perversion of its vision of the natural order of things in a democracy.

The deepest assumption of HIGH NOON is that, all moral systems being

arbitrary, no moral system can account for all contingencies. At the climax of the film *Kelly*, the embodiment of Quaker pacifism, is forced to compromise her principles and shoot a man in order to save Cooper's life. Because Kelly has to cross the line to an antagonistic moral system, the film's contrasted paths of action, by implication, are available to everyone (depending on the circumstances).

It is precisely this rejection of moral absolutism and its consequent expansion of individual choice, judgment, and responsibility, as well as individual uncertainty and error, that is forbidden by the fundamentalist worldview. When Kelly acts out Cooper's code at the climax of *HIGH NOON*, she behaves as the audience might be required to behave one day under similar circumstances. On the other hand, when Gilliom Rogers is allowed to act out Books' code at the climax of *THE SHOOTIST* (Mrs. Rogers herself, being a woman, is not allowed to act at all), it is only in order to purge Gilliom (and the audience) forever of the temptation to step out of their place and to identify with that code.

In the shootouts at the end of the fundamentalist westerns of the Right, we always see the parasitic amorality of the villains annihilated by the leader's heroic self-sufficiency while the town stands passive on the sidelines, helpless. In this scheme, the passivity of the town — its *inability* to act — is central. It is the town's supposedly innate passivity and helplessness that legitimizes and necessitates the aggressive actions of the hero, without whose aid the town would perish. It is true that in *HIGH NOON* the town also remains passive, but it does so out of fear, not out of an innate incapacity to act; its passivity is regarded as an aberration. By contrast, there are many westerns of the liberal Left — perhaps the best example is *SHANE* — in which the hero's courage is contagious. Because of Shane's example, the town is roused from its passivity, asserts itself at last, and finally regains its self-respect.

It is precisely this capacity for cooperative self-determination and its social consequences that is most feared by the fundamentalist worldview. Only Wayne is self-determined in *THE SHOOTIST*. The rest of us are worker ants.

Among the ideological elements of *THE SHOOTIST* are the following: the self-righteous patriarchal hero as judge and executioner of villains, who come from the lowest levels of society; the assumption that society is menaced only from below and never from above; anxiety regarding the inheritance of ideology and the consequent obsession with "rehabilitating" the young; the assigning of different moral ideologies, thus of different codes of conduct, to mutually exclusive groups within society. These elements can of course be found in many other westerns of the Right. What distinguishes *THE SHOOTIST* from other films that share its ideology is a higher level of anxiety than is usually encountered in the western — after all, in 1976 the confidence of the Right had been very badly shaken.

Because *THE SHOOTIST*'s sense of mission is more urgent than that of other films that share its outlook and assumptions, its tone is more

obsessive and its procedures are more carelessly worked out. (This is especially noticeable in the almost cavalier ineptitude with which the script sets up the villains whom Books finally exterminates). Yet this very carelessness is what renders the ambitions and the motives of the film so entirely transparent. Indeed, as with most mass-culture narrative, THE SHOOTIST's narrative choices — and compulsions — all become coherent once one understands the way its social vision intersects its social fears.

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### Shampoo

## Oedipal symmetries and heterosexual satire

by Chuck Kleinhans

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"Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?"  
— Roland Barthes [\[1\]](#)

"One man gouging out his eyes is tragedy. Three, make comedy." — Ann Darr [\[2\]](#)

In SHAMPOO during a 1968 election night Republican banquet in Beverly Hills, businessman Lester Karp tells a dinner companion.

"Yeah, you should've seen those little kids, Senator. About 40 of them. All blind. We put mattresses on the front lawn. They came running out of the house, tripping and stumbling all over the place ... just having a hell of a good time. I mean they were blind, of course, but... I don't know, it gives you a feeling of accomplishment. I can't tell you when I had such a good time."

If we take Lester as a fool, if we appreciate the satire, here's a neat example of capitalist patriarchy's ideological perversion held up for ridicule.

SHAMPOO (1975, d. Hal Ashby) extends this criticism in its dramatic narration and multiplies it through structural repetitions, through oedipal symmetries. How it does so is my interest here. Because the film is well known and accessible, I have omitted a good deal of supporting detail from my argument. Constructed on current mainstream Hollywood lines, the film uses familiar dramatic narration in the service of Hollywood realism (all elements tend to reinforce a central narrative and meaning). For this reason I will not discuss elements of editing, color cinematography, acting, art direction, sound editing, etc. very extensively because they enhance rather than qualify or contradict my

analysis. Without the clutter of detailed support, my main ideas stand out more clearly, and I am not interested in providing a definitive analysis of SHAMPOO. Rather I am reflecting on the nexus of sexuality, power, and possession embodied in its fantasy structure.

### **The Comic Oedipal Structure**

SHAMPOO's basic structure is the comic oedipal situation. Found in many film and stage comedies, the typical oedipal configuration presents a father-and-son rivalry for a woman (mother/ wife/ lover/ betrothed/etc.), and, due to the son's incestuous attraction to the woman (who is initially linked to the father), the rivalry operates as a power struggle within an authority relation. [3] Of course this situation has long been a dramatic convention in Western literature and theatre and frequently noted. For instance, literary theorist Northrop Frye, in discussing what he calls the "normal phase" of comedy, identifies its characteristic conflict as oedipal. [4] For convenience, the oedipal structure can be diagrammed:

*Father and Son are rivals for a Woman (or Possession)* [5]

An historically developed dramatic convention in comedy, the oedipal situation has several noteworthy characteristics. Initially the father controls the woman, and/or he has an advantage over the son. The narrative ridicules the father and treats him as an object or comic butt. Significantly, neither is he the center of attention, nor are we made sympathetic to his side of the struggle. Finally, when ousted from his position, a shift of power takes place. While at first the son is at a disadvantage and chaffs, the younger man finally triumphs, winning power over the father and the woman. Frye notes that this usually appears as the formation of a new society, often marked by a celebration, such as the wedding of the son and the woman. In this triangle, the female arbitrates her own position within a given patriarchal structure; she can choose between the two rivals. Because the woman negotiates her fate, adultery becomes an important comic theme. The narrative provides both aggression against the father and prohibited love in a comic and acceptable form. As the son wins, fantasy triumphs.

SHAMPOO's action shows a set of related transformations of the basic comic oedipal structure. As the film begins. George (Warren Beatty) appears in bed with a married woman, Felicia (Lee Grant). Shortly he departs to see his steady, Jill (Goldie Hawn). As events unfold leading up to a political banquet scene where all the major characters are brought together, we meet Felicia's husband. Lester (Jack Warden), his mistress, Jackie (Julie Christie), Felicia and Lester's daughter, Lorna (Carrie Fisher), and Johnny Pope (Tony Bill). Johnny pursues Jill, Lorna pursues George, and George and Jackie recommence their former romance. Diagrammatically:

*The principal situations:*

- Lester and George are rivals for Felicia.
- Lester and George are rivals for Jackie.

*A counterpoint situation:*

- George and Johnny are rivals for Jill.

*And a minor electra situation:*

- Felicia and Lorna are rivals for George.

The banquet and a subsequent all-night party provide the recognition scenes. George ends up with Jackie, and Jill with Johnny. Felicia and Jill realize George has been deceiving them, and Lester finds his wife has been having an affair with George and his mistress making love with this rival.

In the classic oedipal structure, as found in English Restoration comedy, the son (the rake) wins, confirming a "natural" hierarchy in which virtue is equated with unsentimental self-knowledge, and the superior insights of a few justify duping the fools and ridiculing the self-deceived. But George is not a true rakish hero, for in the end he does not triumph but faces defeat, and the governing hierarchy reveals itself as one based on wealth and the personal power accruing to wealth. Everyone triumphs but George: Johnny gets Jill; Jill gets Johnny and advances her modeling career by agreeing to go to Egypt with him to make a tv commercial; Lester gets Jackie; Jackie gets Lester, who means money and security; and Felicia will get her freedom via an expensive divorce settlement. Even Lorna has gotten what she wants: one-upping her mother by making love with her mother's lover. Another ironic triumph, the 1968 election of Nixon and Agnew, provides the backdrop for the whole process.

### **Structure Considered**

The oedipal structure offers a model to examine the way many dramatic films utilize a complex intersection of power and sexuality, of the political and personal. It also provides a way of discussing the relations between film and society. According to traditional Freudian views, the formation of the oedipal complex constitutes a basic process of child development and the most elaborate of a series of forms through which the infant becomes an adult and in which pleasure, power, and sexuality are produced in practice and in the individual's comprehension of self and the social world. In reproducing oedipal configurations, SHAMPOO presents fantasy material in disguised forms which appear both intriguing and enjoyable in their art.

Although it offers a starting point for analysis, the Freudian explanation (and its Lacanian variations) abstracts the oedipal structure from any social determination outside the family. In Marxist terms, psychoanalysis removes the family from commodity production and history, thus repeating the capitalist division between the productive

sector and the personal sector while it takes the latter as its object of study without any regard to the former. Certainly infant sexuality is first formed within the family. But we must also consider the family as formed historically. Social relations between children and adults, men and women, must be seen in their historical development and in the broad context of the entire society.

The comic oedipal situation enacts a fantasy based on patriarchal social relations. The artistic presentation of this fantasy structure appeals precisely because the audience has a nearly universal experience (in the Western family) of the psychological patterns and tensions the structure embodies. We can see similarities between patriarchally structured human relations as experienced individually and socially in the varying patterns of the Western family unit, the dramatic situations found in SHAMPOO, and the audience members' minds and patterns of response. In short, we are talking about different manifestations of ideology. Ideology is not simply a set of "false ideas" which can be easily replaced with a set of "correct ideas." Rather, it exists in social practice, in everyday activity, in the present, and as history and memory in the individual's conscious/unconscious life. Thus at times the oedipal configuration is known through direct experience as a family member, while at other times it is recognized through mass culture.

In the comic oedipal situation, as is typical of many ideological forms, we see an aspect related to reality (fathers have power, sons chaff at that, men treat women as objects of exchange, etc.) and an aspect which attempts to resolve, to change, that reality (the comic triumph). In his book on jokes Freud pointed out this relation between reality's constraints and people's critical impulse against those restrictions.

"What these jokes whisper may be said aloud: that the wishes and desires of men have a right to make themselves acceptable alongside of exacting and ruthless morality. And in our days it has been said in forceful and stirring sentences that this morality is only a selfish regulation laid down by the few who are rich and powerful and who can satisfy their wishes at any time without postponement. So long as the art of healing has not gone further in making our life safe and so long as social arrangements do no more to make it more enjoyable, so long will it be impossible to stifle the voice within us that rebels against the demands of morality." [6]

This is a particularly interesting passage because it presents one of Freud's more open political statements. The discussion continues with a statement that begins as a possible political program, but which ends in despair:

"... one must not fulfill the demands of one's own needs illegitimately, but must leave them unfulfilled, because only the continuance of so many unfulfilled demands can develop the power to change the order of society. But not every personal need can be postponed in this way and transferred

to other people, and there is no general and final solution to the conflict." [7]

Freud goes on to describe these types of jokes as cynical jokes and says they are often directed against marriage,

"strictly guarded by moral regulations but at the same time more inviting to attack ... There is no more personal claim than that for sexual freedom and at no point has civilization tried to exercise severer suppression than in the sphere of sexuality." [8]

Freud then goes on to quote a sexist joke as an example, and he exhibits his own sexism in the process: "A wife is like an umbrella — sooner or later one takes a cab." [9]

Freud's insights are marred severely by his inability to grasp class and sexual oppression and his own complicity in it. The joke he quotes obviously does not simply refer to the institution of marriage, it attacks women at the same time — the wife and the prostitute — but Freud does not see that demeaning dimension, and his own implication in women's oppression when he tells the joke. While delivering severe criticisms of marriage as an institution, he looks almost totally from the male point of view. Freud provides only a partial analysis. While he notices and criticizes some oppressive aspects of social life, without a fuller understanding of patriarchy and capitalism, he can only propose partial — and thereby unsatisfactory — solutions. [10] Perhaps he realized this himself, since it fits with his consistent pessimism regarding social change and progress.

One aspect of Freud's thought seems useful for a radical understanding of structures in film. His awareness of two aspects of the joke — the first linked to the reality of an oppressive social situation, and the second transcending the first — provides an important insight for understanding the comic oedipal structure. By portraying a comic triumph, by granting the pleasure principle power over the reality principle, the comic oedipal structure affirms the possibility and the desirability of change from the dominant order, of getting beyond the status quo.

SHAMPOO tempers, even reverses, this comic triumph by a narrative movement recuperating the action into the reality principle. While the initial stages of the action give George the comic triumph of cuckolding Lester by way of both Felicia and Jackie, the action turns out to be ironic, and George ends up losing Felicia to her divorce settlement, Jackie to Lester, Jill to Johnny, and being used in a low grade revenge by Lorna. Everyone wins except George. We see another implication built into the narrative since Nixon-Agnew's election which accompanies the action can only be read as a triumph for deceit and hypocrisy in this post-Watergate film. By extension, the film shows its characters as part of that cheap delusion. This too can be understood as an oedipal situation, but without a comic triumph for the underdog.

*Nixon (the Beverly Hills Republicans)  
vs. the Younger Generation (George) as rivals for the USA.*

Although this structure leads to a critique, the critique still remains thin bourgeois ideology because it eliminates class as a meaningful term. At this rate it might seem that everything is oedipal. Not quite. But many power conflicts can be phrased in oedipal terms. The comic oedipal situation represents social reality and also moves to change that reality in a comic triumph which provides a fantasy solution, a utopian element which *can be* read as politically progressive. I want to stress that "can be" read, for critics often mistakenly assume that a structure must convey a singular fixed meaning, and I want to argue for a plurality of meanings. To examine the multiplicity of interpretation, I will proceed by a different route and consider the main character in SHAMPOO, George.

### **A Working Class Anti-hero**

In contrast to every other significant character in the film, George is clearly working class. The point comes across visually by his dwelling, vehicle, clothes, and social gestures, as well as in the plot. George works as a hairdresser, as the employee of a petit-bourgeois shop owner. A relatively young worker, he aspires to become petit-bourgeois himself — to own his own shop. However, he seems unfit for the aspiration. He has not internalized petit-bourgeois values. He refuses to carry out the shop policy to "nickel and dime" the customers for coffee. He does not have the cleverness to manipulate his way into institutions. He does not have the first idea of how to get a bank loan to start his shop. He *does* have his trade (he went to beauty school, not college), good looks (but not a mastery of bourgeois social graces, as revealed in a number of small details), and an understanding of female psychology which he uses to manipulate women. But that is not enough for lasting success, as opposed to momentary sexual conquests, in the bourgeois world of Beverly Hills.

George provides the dramatic viewpoint for the entire action. Through him the audience approaches the situation; he acts as our reference for the action. This is not a matter of identification but rather of George's position within the film's dramatic and filmic organization. We do not identify with George, we do not like him, and we do not take what he says as the truth. Or if we do, only with massive adjustments. In short, he is an anti-hero: a protagonist with whom we do not positively identify, but through whom we understand and evaluate the action.

At the end George loses everything because of his inability to stay with anything. Jackie explains the break up of her previous affair: "George was too much of a gypsy for me." Jill tells him to

"... stop kissing everyone's ass that comes into that shop.  
That's not going to put you in business. That's going to make  
you a kiss-ass.

George: Jill, I'm trying to get things moving.

Jill: Oh, grow up. You never *stop* moving. You never go anywhere. Grow up! Grow up! Grow up."

George constantly moves from woman to woman — a movement underlined with numerous transition shots of him on his motorcycle. (One of the few instances in recent Hollywood film where transportation transition shots actually have a theme and character-revealing importance.) He also constantly changes his words to fit his situation. But his verbal chameleonism with women also limits him. He finally runs out of credible lies for each of them and he loses Jill, Jackie, and Felicia. The only time when we get a sense of George reflecting rather than instantly reacting comes after he has lost the three women and returns to the shop. His assistant, Mary, a middle-aged black woman, tells him that the boss's son, a young enlisted Marine (Mary's son is also a Marine), just died in an auto accident. Stunned, George sits staring at the floor. A short moment, but the implicit parallel to himself is clear: he could have been that Marine; it fits his class position.

The action defines George throughout in terms of the women and not only in terms of his taking advantage of them. In a curious way he belongs in a lower station in society, with women. We see this most clearly with Jackie and Jill, whose characters are partially revealed in their respective houses. Jackie's has been done completely by a decorator — attractive but nothing personal in it. Jill's place seems almost out of a magazine, but not quite: she sticks little magnets shaped like fruit on her refrigerator door, and she has a cluttered night table beside her bed. In many ways Jackie acts as an older version of Jill — more sophisticated, more cynical, more jaded. Both want security. For Jill this means marriage — love, economic security, children. She has read in *Cosmopolitan* that women should have their first child before reaching 30 and tries the idea out on an uninterested George. Jackie thinks this is no world to bring children into. Jackie has given up on traditional romantic love, and in the process of the film Jill learns to give it up: she tells Johnny Pope she is not ready to think about having children yet. For Jackie, security is monetary: "Lester is really great. It's so great to wake up in the morning with your rent paid." The prostitution metaphor emerges clearly later. When Jackie asks George if he likes her hairstyle, he responds, "It makes you look like a hooker," And when Lester calls Jackie a whore, George answers that you could call everyone that.

Jackie and Jill, mistress and model, are making the conventional best of their situations: trading their looks for moving up materially in the world. George has his looks, but cannot (by temperament) trade them to move up. Of course, he could marry into money, but there is no way a divorced Felicia would marry George. For Felicia, George serves basically as a fling.

While Felicia seems a minor role, she actually is pivotal in

understanding the action. She has accepted the system: marriage, wealth, housewifery, and motherhood. But she rebels against it, trying to capture something of her own, and she has taken George as a lover. When she realizes that both her husband and George are unfaithful, she sues for divorce. She stays within the system but also sees it clearly, and at the Beverly Hills Republican victory dinner Felicia serves as our reference for the action. While Senator East delivers an after-dinner speech of astonishing stupidity to attentive wealthy Republicans,

"Felicia (stoned): These people are concerned about more than each other. Is that right?

Lester: Yes, that's right. Some of us are trying to make this country a better place to live, believe it or not.

Felicia: Is that what this is about?

\*\*\*\*

Felicia: Lester, you are a miserable human being. You're not helping anybody. Just twisting arms here ... raising money, for what? A lot of silly sons of bitches."

Felicia has the most acute political analysis of the electoral process of any of the film's characters, due to her frustrated and alienated position as a woman within her privileged upper bourgeois class. Later in the film the political point emerges explicitly when Lester confronts George.

"Lester: I don't know how a guy like you thinks. What do you? Get your kicks sneaking around behind people's backs taking advantage of them? Is that your idea of being anti-establishment?

George: I'm not anti-establishment.

Lester: Was it me? You have something against me?

George: You think I planned it?

Lester: Jackie ... Felicia ... did they have something against me?

George: What am I going to tell you they got against you? Christ, they're women, aren't they? Did you ever listen to women talk, man? Do you? 'Cause I do 'til it's running out of my ears. I mean, I'm on my feet all day long and all I do is listen to women talk, and they only talk about one thing: how some guy fucked them over. That's all I ever hear about. Did you ever think about that?

Lester: I follow your thinking on that.

George: Let's face it. We're always trying to nail them and

they know it. They don't like it. They like it, and they don't like it. It's got nothing to do with you, Lester. It just happened. Felicia's got nothing to do but shop and get her hair done. She's getting older, and her daughter hates her."

Insecurity motivates the women. Felicia needs assurance she is sexually attractive. In one scene in the shop, to bolster her spirits, George holds Felicia's head, hair wet and stringy, and calls out to the others present, "Hey, Felicia looks great, doesn't she?" "Great, great." (The repetition of "great" is a *leitmotif*, becoming increasingly hollow in its overuse.) Felicia smiles a little.

Jill too wants security and sees that as marriage to George. She thus accepts, during a quarrel with him, his hypocritical confession that all he wants is to have his own shop and grow old with her. A moment later Jill's belief in his words disappears as she finds another woman's earring in his bed.

Jackie, angry at Lester's neglect of her at the dinner party, runs off with George, but her ambivalence (which initially allows romantic and sexual feelings for George) firmly resolves itself the morning after on the side of monetary security — that is, Lester.

George's motivations are not clear. At times it seems he believes his lies, living them as compulsively as he does the rest of his life. [\[11\]](#) The film ends with our anti-hero having lost everything: Jill, Jackie, Felicia, and his business prospects with Lester's backing. The film ends there, but the camera holds so long on George that it invites — no, demands — our evaluation of him. He still has his trade, his looks, and his way with women. But what does that add up to? — the inadequacy of his working class assets to match his middle class aspirations.

### **Between Screen and Audience**

In the end George has to face up to the inadequacy of his working class assets to match his middle class aspirations. But does he have to? Will he? Are there not other possible interpretations of George? Of course, there are. Take the comments of someone who is quite familiar with the film, its scriptwriter, Robert Towne.

"It's a movie about people who seem to be looking for things they don't really want, people who are accepting views of themselves they don't really want. Lee Grant (playing Felicia) feels she *should* be married to this man (Jack Warden playing Lester), but it isn't going to make her happy. Julie Christie (playing Jackie) feels she *should* be made an "honest woman" with material comforts, but I don't think that would make her very happy. Goldie Hawn (playing Jill) thinks she should settle for certain things. George is really the hero of the picture. He thinks it's more important to have a good time than make a fortune, which is what everyone else is trying to do. Only George hasn't accepted somebody else's

view of himself. He's very sweet: He never seduces anybody. He's really the girl in the movie, if you follow what I meant He's really the dumb-blond in the picture. And in the end you sort of feel sorry for him. He's promiscuous yet capable of deep feelings, he's not terribly deep intellectually, but he's a nice kid." [\[12\]](#)

In the same interview, Towne says the film's ending is ambiguous, that while he was trying to show that the characters would go on in the same way, learning nothing, audiences often interpret the ending with George alone and crying as his punishment "for screwing around too much." [\[13\]](#)

The preceding analysis of George's character, either as working class anti-hero or as "dumb-blond," and other analyses of this type exist within a very specific historical framework. Our culture asks us to reify character, both agents in dramatic narratives and people we know in everyday life. Because it's so "natural" to our epoch and society, we usually forget the ideological nature of such a concept of character, that it invites us to see a dramatic agent as an individual, a complete ego, and, if not a "real person" certainly *like* a real person. Thinking of film characters in this way we are led to ask what becomes of them "after the film." The effect is compounded when we know a star image from other films and celebrity. Warren Beatty's career pattern of playing somewhat genial "dumb" men who find themselves in a situation they can't handle is well known: *SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS*, *MICKEY ONE*, *BONNIE AND CLYDE*, *McCABE AND MRS. MILLER*, *HEAVEN CAN WAIT*, etc. Beatty's presence as George is also ironic since he had a well-publicized affair with Julie Christie, and Hollywood reporters and fan/scandal publications portray him throughout his career as a playboy.

Treating film characters as if they were real, and character (or personality) as a finite and limited thing has been compounded in our age by the tendency of Freudian thought to assume personality as a solitary reification. [\[14\]](#) As a psychology of individual consciousness rather than social relations, Freudian psychoanalysis reproduces one of the most central aspects of bourgeois ideology — individualism. In so doing, Freudian thought varies only superficially from common-sense psychology, of which some variant usually informs contemporary analyses of film characters. Ed Buscombe has described this pragmatic approach very well in discussing Robin Wood's analysis of Hitchcock:

"Wood's whole case for Hitchcock is based on his argument that the characters are central and that the meaning of every part of the films can only be grasped in relation to these characters ... Two points can be made about the kind of psychology Wood employs in his analysis of character. Firstly, it is a common sense, everyday psychology; it analyzes the motives of characters in the narrative as one might those of real people with whom one comes into contact, by assuming a simple cause and effect between what they do

and why they do it. [In NORTH BY NORTHWEST] Roger Thornhill jumps a taxi queue; therefore he is selfish. Secondly, the psychology is strongly normative. People "ought" to behave in a certain way. The argument for using this kind of psychology in relation to Hitchcock's film is obvious enough. The film is produced within and for a certain kind of society: it therefore employs the psychology available to that society, and unless we are similarly able to employ it we cannot read the film. The problem is that there is surely a difference between employing such a psychology as a means of understanding the characters, and endorsing it as a model of what the world is and should be like." [\[15\]](#)

In viewing mainstream Hollywood films, viewers are expected to and do construct characters and meanings and reify them. Consider character: manuals of playwriting, scriptwriting, and screen acting clearly outline the conventions of character presentation. Manuals of cinematography and editing describe conventions for filmic completion of character. Thus, within a few shots of the opening of SHAMPOO the audience begins to form an impression of George, a general idea of what he is like. In other words, the audience quickly begins to "guess" a character's class, status, life style and personality from clothing, environment, and non-verbal elements such as stature, gesture, voice inflection, etc., as well as from the verbal dramatic development and the specifically filmic progression. This constant wagering of probable interpretation against accumulating evidence quickly produces a general character configuration which can be expressed in reductionist adjectival shorthand: George is .... As Buscombe points out, this common sense psychology is necessary for viewing, but it is ideological as well.

How we interpret George and how we react to him and the film's conclusion and thereby how we understand their "meaning," depends in large part on what we bring to the film. Clearly, individual factors operate here, but individual factors are never autonomous because they come into being and exist within an individual's social context and are thus shared with others. The people who market Hollywood films are totally aware that different types of audiences respond differently to films. During and after the film's initial release I saw SHAMPOO a number of times with different audiences, and each kind of audience tended to have a different reaction. A preview crowd of young adults, a 22-35 year old group of media and advertising types who got freebie tickets, and the audience at a theatre located in an upper-middle class high rise apartment building, did not seem to respond well to the satire of people on the make, of personal and public morality shown equally tawdry and corrupt. Perhaps the film was hitting too close to home. In both cases, of course, the audiences had largely lived through the events of '68 culminating in Nixon's election, and clearly, from their current position, they had basically bought into that very system shown as rotten in the film. The film was perhaps too uncomfortable a mirror. In a middle class suburban shopping center, an audience that seemed predominantly middle-aged did not appear to find Lester as laughable a

comic butt as did an audience in a multi-ethnic working class neighborhood, which strongly picked up on the film's ridicule of the businessman, with several people loudly calling him a "fool" several times.

These are, of course, impressions and hardly constitute scientific data. But they are suggestive, even if colored by wishful thinking on my part, because they indicate that even within a Hollywood film that manipulates identification, that gives the illusion of reality, the audience's response actually varies a good deal and this variation is probably linked to social position. In a survey of audience interpretations of the film *THE PEDESTRIAN*, Evan Pattak discovered a not very surprising but often ignored fact: interpretation of even the most obvious narrative elements varies immensely and includes totally contradictory understanding of the same material. In a study of *THE LAST AMERICAN HERO* and *EVEL KNIEVEL*, I showed that the narrative and central characters had a distinctly different significance for working class people than for a middle class audience. [16] Research along these lines undercuts the common assumption by mainstream and radical critics that Hollywood films provide a single meaning.

Freud's remarks on misreading are pertinent here:

"In a very large number of cases it is the reader's preparedness that alters the text and reads into it something which he [sic] is expecting or with which he is occupied. The only contribution towards a misreading which the text itself need make is that of affording some sort of resemblance in the verbal image, which the reader can alter in the sense he requires. [17]

Freud suggests that "the reader's preparedness" changes texts Can this be extended to say a viewer's position in ideology changes her/his understanding of films? Freud explains that one's profession or present situation will shape misreading too. Clearly this needs further examination, commencing with the understanding that any theory of how films are read must include a theory of how films are misread, of how variation and difference in the audience change readings, and how this is related to class, race, sex and other social factors.

In its frequent vagueness and generality, the Hollywood film often seems distinguished by its deliberate openness to multiple interpretations. For example, *JULIA* presents a relation between two women which is left sexually ambiguous. (I think this is what the New Hollywood regards as "maturity" — better called coyness: you don't tell the audience everything.) As a result, the Julia-Lillian relation can be read in a variety of ways, including the following:

1. a heterosexual relation of close friendship,
2. a sexually active lesbian relation,
3. a sexually active lesbian relation, but only in adolescence,
4. a platonic lesbian relation,

5. a symbolic lesbian relation,
6. a relation of bisexual women,
7. etc., etc., etc.

This very multiplicity in possible interpretation invites — even demands — that the audience "close" the open statement about the Julia-Lillian relation. Of course, characters are not real people, and of course some of the preceding readings have more evidence in the film than others, but by its very ambiguity and multiplicity, the film does ask us to draw a conclusion — one we probably make largely with regard to non-filmic factors.

Thus if you wish it were a lesbian relation, if that is a pleasing fantasy, you might conclude that it is. On the other hand, if you are disturbed by that idea, you might repress the thought. The multiplicity of the film interacts with significant audience variables. In a sense the film chooses to not choose — it is liberal and pluralistic in form as well as in open political content. While moving beyond the old moralism (lesbians are bad), this hip liberalism rests on the assumption that we can all be adult about lesbian love. JULIA tries to have it both ways, or all ways. It is very carefully constructed to be open to a variety of interpretations. Thus a political question (how the film will portray lesbian relations) is resolved by flattering a spectrum of diverse prejudices. Pluralism in action.

SHAMPOO operates in similar ways. The basic misunderstanding that drives the plot forward matches William Wycherley's Restoration comedy, *The Country Wife* (1672). In the play, Horner carries on affairs with impunity because husbands are convinced he is a eunuch and thus a "safe" companion for their wives. In SHAMPOO because George works as a woman's hairdresser, Lester assumes he is homosexual. The film repeats the stereotype by portraying the shop owner, Norman, and another stylist as "effeminate" in voice, gesture, etc. (In a liberal recuperation, Norman is shown to have a son whom he deeply loves.)

The misunderstanding about George's sexuality begins with the sequence in Lester's office. Lester and Jackie fight. He's jealous of her spending time with an unemployed actor, Steve.

*Lester vs. Steve as rivals for Jackie.*

She retorts that he doesn't spend enough time with her. Lester then thinks of having "safe" George escort Jackie to the evening's victory banquet.

The joke continues in various ways, notably in the bathroom sequence at Jackie's when Lester arrives, Jackie and George have begun lovemaking, Lester arrives, but George's affectation of an "effeminate" nervousness convinces Lester that nothing is going on. The joke continues at the banquet when Johnny — unaware that his date, Jill, has been having a long affair with George — assumes George is gay. At one point George, nervously trying to carry on small talk at the banquet, tells Lester how

he would restyle Lester's hair. As George touches Lester's hair, Johnny arrives and assumes Lester is now the object of George's desire. Johnny is further confused when he sees Felicia dragging George into the women's washroom. Like much humor, the comedy here both uses and jokes with cultural stereotypes (male hairdressers are gay; gays act in certain obvious and specific ways). Because of this dual action of presenting and inverting, a strong ambiguity is established that allows for laughter, both with and at the stereotype, depending on the spectator's own frame of reference.

Such irony in the film serves Hollywood's immediate end of making money by reaching the largest audience. Rather than the blandness of offending no one, or the calculated outrageousness of offending everyone, sensitive issues are portrayed to please almost everyone. For example, I first saw *10* (d. Blake Edwards) in a theatre in liberal, professional-managerial middle-class Evanston, Illinois, a Chicago suburb. The audience was silent during a parallel cut telephone sequence between the protagonist lyricist (Dudley Moore) and his composer partner (Robert Webber). Drinking and crying after his young male lover left him, Webber urges Moore to go back to his wife. The second time I saw the film, in small town Dixon, Illinois (Ronald Reagan's Boyhood Home), the same sequence brought much laughter and several loud exclamations of the "fucking faggot, who does he think he is" variety. The sequence clearly allows — even encourages — both readings. Each is sexist in its own way: gays have feelings just like "normal" people, but their relations are unstable and doomed, pity the old queer; or, fags are ridiculous, deluded and despicable for trying to mimic heterosexual love.

The audience uses the plurality of the film: sometimes appreciating the ambiguity, and other times attempting to close an open element. Audiences are not simply passive receptacles of film experience; they are active: constantly choosing, selecting and re-arranging the process of the film into an ordered experience. Often this becomes the attempt to construct a single unified interpretation of a character (rather like the process we all go through in trying to understand our friends and the people we work and live with). Often this process ends with the attempted reduction into a moral, or into a speculation on what will happen next. But whatever the specific reading of a film that a spectator makes, the process is a complex and active one. From this point of view, the current commonplace of semiotic-psychoanalytic-influenced criticism that "the film constructs the audience" can be seen as a very partial insight that must be completed with the observation that in many ways, "the audience constructs the film." [18]

**(Continued on [page 2](#))**

# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

### *Shampoo*, page 2

by Chuck Kleinhans

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### Meaning and Context

In a capsule review of SHAMPOO Don Druker described the film as follows:

"A brilliant collaboration involving actor-writer Warren Beatty, co-author Robert Towne, director Hal Ashby, and co-stars Julie Christie, Goldie Hawn, Lee Grant, and Jack Warden. Genuinely funny (in a terrifying, puzzling, tragic way) this tale of sexual/political hypocrisy in Beverly Hills (circa 1968) raises the inescapable issue of the Nixon era: how can we explain away our responsibility for the moral debacle of the last seven years when our private acts mirror our public postures so unerringly? Highly recommended."

[\[19\]](#)

Similarly, Warren Beatty said,

"It's a movie about the intermingling of political and sexual hypocrisy ... We set it on election night because the point is, you see, that Nixon never really *misled* us — he was an open book. We knew all along about Nixon, we saw through him, and *still* he was elected." [\[20\]](#)

These are fair summaries of the film's meaning. The micro-society of its characters exists in the macro-society of the United States. None of them can reject what they live. Felicia has a clear, though limited, view of it, but she is not about to opt out. Everyone gains, everyone ascends, except George.

To some extent fully understanding the political theme of the film relies on projecting oneself back to 1968, to having lived through Nixon's landslide election. Even more importantly, understanding the politics depends on remembering the events before the election: the Tet offensive (turning point in the Vietnam war), the largest surge of the anti-war movement, the spring intensity of the student movement

(particularly at Columbia), Lyndon Johnson's withdrawal from the election, the May '68 events in France and Italy, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the failure of the Gene McCarthy movement, another long, hot summer of ghetto rebellions, the Chicago Democratic convention and its police riot. Mid-'68 was also a moment when people had to decide which side they were on. And it was also a moment when the opposition movement was not strong enough to genuinely challenge the system.

Ashby, Towne, and Beatty present two parts of this American moment. We see the finale of electoral politics showing the Nixon supporters (Lester and the Republican rich) and those who reject or ignore him but who don't oppose him (George, Jackie, Jill, Felicia, Johnny, and the crowd at the continuous party estate). We also see the characters' personal and sexual situation. With everyone ascending and winning in the micro-world of the screen action, except George, and with the triumph of Nixon-Agnew on the national level, the hypocrisy theme emerges. What kind of a triumph is this? To a post-Agnew, post-Watergate, post-Nixon audience, the point is inescapable.

At the banquet ironic bits of campaign rhetoric underline the message. (Agnew on a TV monitor: "Exactly what can a President do to affect the moral tone of the country?") The next morning Lester confronts George:

"Lester: I just wish I knew what the hell I was living for.

Nixon (on TV, as a teenager held up a sign, 'Bring Us Together'): ... and that will be the great objective of this administration ...

Lester: Maybe Nixon will be better. What's the difference? They're all a bunch of jerks."

In short, Nixon was the president these people deserved.

### **The Personal Is Political**

SHAMPOO'S comic satire rests on the presentation and interpenetration of the realms of production and reproduction, public and personal, work and leisure, normally kept apart in capitalist society. The beauty shop in SHAMPOO has a dual aspect. It functions as a site of production, a business, and the place where George labors as a skilled craft worker. At the same time, for the customers it serves as a site of reproduction, a place where, they become conventionally attractive so they can carry out their social roles as women. The shop is an extension of the home, a place of consumption. In fact, George visits Felicia and Lester's house to comb out her hair — business — but encounters daughter Lorna and then Felicia, both of whom entice him into lovemaking — pleasure. The same thing happens when George goes to Jackie's to do her hair. In capitalist terms, as phrased in petit-bourgeois ideology with a hint of Puritanism in the service of primitive capitalist accumulation, George's mistake in life is "mixing business with

pleasure." Lester repeats the error. By bringing his mistress (pleasure) into the Republican banquet (business), he precipitates a crisis when mistress asserts pleasure in the face of Nixonian business:

"Roth: Aren't you hungry, Miss Shawn?

Jackie: Not for rubber chicken, no.

Roth: Maybe I can get you something.

Jackie: Oh, that's very sweet of you. Mr. Roth. You must be very important.

Roth: Well, whatever I am. I think I can get you whatever you'd like.

Jackie: Whatever I like.

Roth: Whatever you like.

Jackie: Most of all (gestures toward George, beside her) d like to suck his cock (crawls under table in front of George)."

In portraying the relation of production and reproduction, SHAMPOO presents an interesting set of oedipal situations.

*(a) the friendly father*

- Norman vs. George over the shop.

Norman is trying to teach George how to be a small businessman (nickel and dime the customers, be punctual, etc.) while George chaffs at the constraints of production on his leisure.

*(b) the hostile father*

- Banker vs. George over \$ to start business.

George doesn't understand the terms or manners of getting a bank loan. Frustrated, rejected, humiliated by the banker's middle-class cool, he can only respond with "you asshole!"

*(c) the rival father*

- Lester vs. George over \$ to start business.

Lester at first refuses George the money (which Felicia tried to arrange) on business grounds, but softens to "we'll see" when he needs George's help to get Jackie to the banquet.

When the oedipal structure enters the world of business, it forms the nexus of power and sex, personal and political, business and pleasure, production and reproduction. Significantly, in each of these three oedipal situations, George is basically powerless. He can gain power

only in the private realm, directly by deceiving women and thereby indirectly by tricking Lester.

In a crucial article on ideological film analysis, Charles Eckert shows how the Hollywood film can deal with problems that have their source in class conflict, but by reducing them to an existential level. He shows how in *MARKED WOMAN* ethical and regional differences are expressed as dilemmas which stand for displaced class conflicts. [21] A similar operation takes place in *SHAMPOO*. However, the interpenetration of love and money is more complete in the later film: the oedipal love situations are doubled by the oedipal business situations.

Someone might object that taken to such a degree of generalization, the oedipal situation begins to lose meaning as a critical concept. In terms of strict Freudian analysis, certainly. But we might try to rewrite the basic oedipal situation in social terms.

### *Power vs. Lack of Power in pursuit of Desired Object.*

In its comic form the power differential (based on any number of aspects—class, race, wealth, sex, sexual identity, age, etc.) is overcome by a fantasy triumph (for example, George cuckolds Lester) which thus presents an alternative set of values (youth, cleverness, sexuality, etc.) This set of alternatives can take on a particularly acute set of political values, as for example in Beaumarchais' 18th century comedies, *The Barber of Seville* and *Figaro's Marriage*, both of which were seen as political dramas taking a clear class stand for the rising bourgeoisie and against the aristocracy. *SHAMPOO* is not so optimistic, nor so obvious in its class politics. George "wins" in the sexual arena at the start only to lose in both the sexual and power realms by the end.

### **Kiss Oedipus Goodbye**

If we assume the present social reality of a given culture will tend to be the basis for the fantasy and imaginative life of individuals in that culture, then we could also assume that a culture's art would use, repeat, and vary the patterns of social life. Such an assumption is at the center of Marxist and feminist analyses of film, however much variety (and antagonism) we find among individual critics and however much writers may want to distance themselves from disastrously simplistic reflections theories ("film reflects life"). As I've argued, the comic oedipal situation in film can and should be understood as connected to social relations. In other words, understanding this structure helps us make connections between art and historical, material life. That is, after all, not such a peculiar path of investigation for a Marxist. But at the same time such structural analysis has been viewed skeptically at best by many Marxist culture critics and is ignored by most of them.

Marxist analyses of specific popular films tend to stay close to traditional plot, character, theme analysis — the kind of watered-down aristotelianism that dominates the high school teaching of narrative

literature. It aims at finding the open or hidden meaning of a film in order to then judge it on a scale of political usefulness. To examine structure disrupts such procedures, and in this way structural analysis poses a decisive problem for many Marxist culture critics. I want to make it clear that I'm not claiming that my presentation of oedipal structures in SHAMPOO is exhaustive. It is literally and figuratively schematic and static and could hardly satisfy requirements for extended textual analysis (though it could be elaborated on another occasion). However, in its simplicity it still forms a sizable monkey wrench to throw into mechanical Marxist criticism. Just for openers, it shows that Marxist critics must link class with an understanding of sexual politics, for the comic oedipal structure is clearly a patriarchal one, not universal but actively present in different class societies. It also shows there is a level and kind of textual activity which takes place "below" the film's surface and the viewer's consciousness.

Considering comic oedipal structures lets us see not only repeated patterns, but also changes on those patterns — variations which themselves are revealing. The structure centers its power in the rivalry of men — a rivalry which embodies power, competition and aggression and which plays out the scenario of sexual control. For indeed, it is in the relations of men and in the changing tensions of that relation that the structure establishes the basis for audience recognition. We could think of that obligatory sequence in wild animal documentaries where males pair off to fight for territory and for possession of a female while she sits on the sidelines in apparent disinterest. And we see all around us ample evidence that it is precisely in antagonistic relations with other men that heterosexual men invest much of their energy. The truth is in the fight, not in the prize. [\[22\]](#)

*Father vs. Son as rivals for Woman/Possession.*

Women stay figuratively on the sidelines, empowered at best to aid, abet, encourage: cheerleaders. But when we shift the dramatic point of view to the woman, the structure takes on a new resonance. For example, the third part of LUCIA (Cuba, Humberto Solás, 1959) presents a standard marital farce situation set in the first stages of socialism. Once married, male chauvinist hubby becomes insanely jealous when an attractive young man from Havana arrives to teach Lucia literacy. While the film does not totally shift dramatic point of view to Lucia, it privileges her desire for independence through the validation of a chorus-like community and witty didactic refrains from *Guantanamera*, the improvisation-based national song. Lucia walks out of the possessive relation with her husband and into the supportive community of women in her work brigade. DAISIES (Czech, Vera Chytilova, 1966) provides another example. Two young women, complaining that there's no place for them in society, proceed to have a zany series of adventures which feature putting men on and ridiculing their pretensions while the film visually underlines the events with visuals such as the pair spearing, roasting, and eating phallic sausages. Another irreverent pair of women in CELINE AND JULIE GO

BOATING (France, 1974, Jacques Rivette) demolish men and male authority in whacky escapades. [23]

By shifting the dramatic viewpoint to the women we obtain a different perspective on the comic oedipal situation, one which mocks and satirizes the importance usually given the male power struggle itself. The Soviet comedy BED AND SOFA (USSR, 1927. Abram Room) portrays a *ménage à trois* in which a wife transfers her affections and body from husband to husband's buddy. Later, finding herself pregnant, she realizes she wants neither man, takes control of her destiny by walking out on the guys, and sets off on her own as a single mother-to-be. [24] Sometimes the only way out of a double bind is the door. Today filmmakers and other artists concerned with breaking from the dominant ideology must consider radically critiquing the oedipal structure and leaving it behind.

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### **Images and captions:**

1. George on his motorcycle: In SHAMPOO, transportation transition sequences serve to develop plot and character. Today this tends to be the exception because transportation transitions are so common in television thematic series and made-for-TV movies where they generally serve as cheap filler, shots easily edited to different length for padding out or shortening the narration as needed to get to the-newt commercial break. They often serve as outdoor establishing sequences (we are in L.A., or N.Y. or Paris, etc.), which can be stock shots or inexpensive extreme long shots with a moving vehicle (often a landscape or cityscape, often combined with a zoom and modest pan), shot with inexpensive stand-ins for the stars. They are also popular because they can be easily intercut with vehicle interior sequences which, being a standard studio set up, are fairly easy and inexpensive. The vehicles in SHAMPOO reinforce the characters. George drives a Triumph motorcycle, Lester a Rolls Royce, Jackie a Mercedes sedan, Felicia, a black Cadillac, Johnny a red Porche, and a Mustang is parked outside of Jill's place. The cars reveal statue and hint at personality traits. In the hands of some directors, cars embody personality, as in those great stylists of hyperbole, Russ Meyer and Douglas Sirk.

2. Jill and George sitting in bed: Jill stares vacantly at the television, changing channels with the remote control, while George talks. This is a fairly contemporary gesture for actors: the TV stare usually accompanied by diffuse blue-green waist-high lighting. The TV point of view shot is an increasingly common one in the past 25 years of American film. Here it is used alone, without the reverse shot showing what is on TV, continuing the film's dichotomy of public events vs. private lives, often expressed with TV sets with no one watching.

3. Jackie and George standing next to each other in the parking garage: After running into each other at Lester's office, Jackie and George talk in the garage. Although this production still does not resemble a shot in the film, it displays Jackie's initial hairstyle which George says makes her

look like a hooker. The film uses period hairstyles, circa 1968, which are coded as dated by 1975 when the film was released. Jackie's streaked hair, falling in curls below the shoulder, is redone by George in a uniform blonde to fall straight to the shoulder and curl under, a more "classic" style with connotations of maturity, restraint, expensive taste. These connotations are reinforced by the contrast with the initial style's connotations — flashy, sexy, pointedly artificial — echoed in her clothing and jewelry.

I've heard an apocryphal story that the film was shown on first release to a large convention of hair stylists who warmly appreciated it. For such an audience the plot and character significance of hairstyle would be more actively part of the film experience. George's hair is styled to have a slightly windblown, disheveled look with loose curls and locks, as if he were distracted, busy, and without time to get all the details in order: a metaphor for his life.

4. Close up of Lorna, Felicia and Lester's daughter, in a tennis outfit: Felicia and Lester's daughter, Lorna (Carrie Fisher), tells George that she's never been inside a beauty shop. The extent of her rebellion against her parents can be judged by her Lacoste tennis wear, which she wears on the family court while playing with a hired professional partner.

5. George's beauty shop: Felicia fingers her wet hair in the foreground at the beauty shop while George talks with Jill, who has dropped in for an urgent personal discussion. This production still does not match any shot in the film, although it reproduces figuratively the dramatic situation found in this sequence. George is between two women. Jill assumes that Felicia is only a customer. Felicia suspects that any woman who feels free to call George away from work must be a rival.

6. Medium shot of George, Jill, and Felicia: Arriving at the Republican banquet, Jill in wool bouclé and Jackie in a fur discover that they and Felicia all have the same basic hairstyle — not surprising since they all have the same hairstylist. Still, it's embarrassing under the circumstances, though this is not explicitly brought out.

7. Felicia, Lester, Jackie, and George standing together at the Republican banquet: Felicia and Jackie, wife and mistress, meet and face off with Felicia at a disadvantage in her liter girl sailor suit up against Jackie's sequined black sheath. Jackie wins the round by turning her back on Felicia, revealing a back cut open down to the bottom of her spine.

8. Close up of Lester and Felicia: At the election party, Felicia announces her divorce by asking Lester if he likes Jackie, adding that he'd better, because Jackie's going to be very expensive (when Lester adds in Felicia's divorce settlement).

9. Men sitting around Julie Christie: The film uses the prostitution metaphor but doesn't reflect on how its makers could be seen as

pimping off Julie Christie although they are quite aware of the film's commodity nature and how their jobs serve the end of making money. What is not said, what goes without saying, is ideological. Here is an excerpt for an interview with screenwriter Robert Towne from *American Film* (1:3, Dec. 1975, p. 44):

What is behind the moment in the party scene when Julie Christie goes under the table?

Towne: At this point — probably \$30 million of film rental.

It's a large success, isn't it?

Towne: I'm told it's the biggest financial success Columbia Pictures has ever had.

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## Notes

[1.](#) Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, tr. Richard Miller (NY: Hill & Wang, 1975), p. 47.

[2.](#) Ann Darr, "Dear Oedipus," in *We Become New: Poems by Contemporary American Women*, ed. Lucille Iverson and Kathryn Ruby (NY: Bantam, 1975), p. 147.

[3.](#) Analysis of this structure was first presented by Ludwig Jeckels, "Zur Psychologie der Komödie," *Imago*, 12 (1926). 328-335. Charles Mauron elaborates on it in *Des Metaphores obsédantes en mythe personnel* (Paris: Corti, 1962) and *Psychocritique du genre comique* (Paris: Corti, 1964). Mauron also points out the common good son/bad son variant which is prevalent in comedy. Non-comic versions of the oedipal structure appear in melodrama, tragedy, and modernist dramatic narratives.

[4.](#) Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (NY: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 163-186.

[5.](#) In some works, particularly Roman comedy, the rivalry is over the father's money. When possessions form the third element, the rivalry often appears between a master/father and a servant/son. The substitution of woman/possession makes it clear that females are objects of exchange in the structure.

[6.](#) Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, tr. James Strachey (NY: Norton, 1960), p. 110. The use of "men" is quite accurate here.

[7.](#) Freud, *Jokes*, p. 110.

[8.](#) Freud, *Jokes*, p. 110.

[9.](#) Freud, *Jokes*, p. 110. Freud explains that the joke depends on a simile, an allusion, and an omission, and elaborates:

"One [male] marries in order to protect oneself against the temptations of sensuality, but it turns out nevertheless that

marriage does not allow the satisfaction of needs that are somewhat stronger than usual. In just the same way, one takes an umbrella with one to protect oneself from the rain and nevertheless gets wet in the rain. In both cases one must look around for a stronger protection: in the latter case one must take a public vehicle, and in the former a woman who is accessible in return for money ... One does not venture to declare aloud and openly that marriage is not an arrangement calculated to satisfy a man's sexuality .... The strength of this joke lies in the fact that nevertheless — in all kinds of roundabout ways — it *has* declared it." (p. 111)

10. For Freud, the goal of the psychic activity as expressed in the concept of the pleasure principle is to reduce tension, avoid pain, and find pleasure. At the same time, the reality principle intervenes and shapes the pleasure principle:

"the search for satisfaction does not take the most direct routes but instead makes detours and postpones the attainment of its goal according to the conditions imposed by the outside world."

(J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Hogarth, 1973, p. 379)

11. George participates in the deceit and hypocrisy but seems to be pardoned, or at least less venial, because his motivations involve the immediate libidinal pleasure of making love with a willing woman, and because he loses in the end while others win. The others' motives seem "worse" in the film's moral universe: revenge, money, career advancement, insecurity, boredom, etc. These motives could be connected to the characters' class positions, though the film does not provide much evidence for so doing. Such an interpretation would probably justify George's deceit and hedonism as more "honest" and "natural," (workers are children?) and suppress the sexual politics involved,

12. Robert Towne, quoted in "Movies: Robert Towne — script, scalpel, action. Oscar," by Gene Siskel, *Chicago Tribune*, May 9, 1976, Section 6, p. 6

13. Robert Towne, quoted in "'Shampoo' ending you didn't see," by Gene Siskel, *Chicago Tribune*, May 9, 1976, section 6, p. 2. Towne explains another conclusion he wrote.

"The way 'Shampoo' would have ended — if we had shot the extra scene, was with a jump forward in time six years to 1974. In the scene Julie and Goldie Hawn are having lunch at Mildred Pierce's, the same restaurant they were in at the beginning of the picture. Only now Julie is married to Jack Warden and is having the same complaints as Lee Grant's character had. And Goldie is now a kept woman like Julie

had been. We showed all that in a couple of sentences of dialog. Then, all of a sudden, there's the sound of a motorcycle and George drives up with a 20-year-old blonde. He goes into the restaurant to pick up an order, and while he's inside Julie and Goldie go over to the girl on the motorcycle and ask her how George is doing. She says [in repetition of the film's most oft-repeated line], 'Oh, George is *great*.' And then she adds, 'He's going to open his own [hairdressing] shop soon.' That ending would have showed more of the feeling we were after, that George had recovered from the Julie Christie incident, that he was still trying to open his own shop, and that most likely he wasn't going to live a terribly successful life."

[14.](#) R.D. Laing remarks in *The Politics of Experience* (NY: Ballantine, 1968), p. 49:

"The metapsychology of Freud, Federn, Rapaport, Hartman, Kris, has no constructs for any social system generated by more than one person at a time. Within its own framework it has no concepts of social collectivities of experience shared or unshared between persons. This theory has no category of 'you,' as there is in the work of Feuerbach, Buber, Parsons. It has no way of expressing the meeting of an 'I' with 'an other,' and the impact of one person on another. It has no concept of 'me' except as objectified as 'the ego.'"

[15.](#) Ed Buscombe, "Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," BFI Education Department mimeo paper, c. 1976, pp. 1-2. A similar point was made by Alan Lovell in *Screen*, 10:2 (Mar./Apr. 69) and responded to by Wood in the following issue. In the U.S., Joan Mellen provides many examples of positing the critic's personal preferences as gauges for character evaluation in her study of male star roles, *Big Bad Wolves*. Julia Lesage critiqued this problem in reviewing Mellen's *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film* (JUMP CUT, no. 1 (Nay/June '74).

[16.](#) Evan Pattack, "Responses to THE PEDESTRIAN: Walking to the Sounds of Different Drummers," JUMP CUT, no. 7 (May-July '75), 24-26. Kleinhans, "EVEL KNIEVEL and THE LAST AMERICAN HERO: Contemporary Working Class Film Heroes," JUMP CUT, no. 2 (July-Aug. '74), 11-14.

[17.](#) Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, tr. Alan Tyson, ed. James Strachey (NY: Norton, 1960), pp. 112-113.

[18.](#) For example, Claire Johnston, "Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses," *Edinburgh 76 Magazine*, p. 50.

"The central question which psychoanalysis has raised for film theory in general and for feminist film theory in particular, is what kind of reader the film text constructs, the positioning of the subject in relation to patriarchal ideology."

And Edward Branigan, "Subjectively under Siege — From Fellini's 8-1/2 to Oshima's THE MAN WHO LEFT HIS WILL ON FILM," *Screen*, 19:1 (Spring 1978) 39.

"Just as it constructs inconsistent characters, the text [Oshima's film] constructs an inconsistent spectator."

[19.](#) Don Drucker, *Chicago Reader*, 1975, passim.

[20.](#) Beatty, interview with Roger Ebert, "What Really Thrills Warren Beatty," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Midwest Magazine, June 29, 1975, p. 6.

[21.](#) Charles Eckert, "The Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's MARKED WOMAN," *Film Quarterly*, 27:2 (Winter 73-74), 11-24.

[22.](#) Perhaps not in the gender of the prize, either. For an extended psychoanalytic discussion of the formation of men's oedipal relations: Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1978). French feminist Monique Wittig asks of the incest taboo, what if it isn't a question of the son desiring the mother and the daughter desiring the father, but the son desiring the father and the daughter desiring the mother?

[23.](#) An extensive analysis of the film: Julia Lesage, "CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING: Subversive Fantasy," *JUMP CUT*, no. 24/25, 36-43.

[24.](#) The heroine isn't totally free from patriarchy: she is discouraged from having an abortion. The film's politics thus match state policy at the time.

### Three films on El Salvador

by Michael Chanan

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Introduction to *Jump Cut* special section: Films in struggle  
— John Hess

The six films discussed here were made in the midst of class conflict (not excluding *ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS*, of course, the review of which we have reprinted as a counterpoint to the rest of the films). The filmmakers were direct participants or, though outsiders, dependent for their very lives on the people they depict. Committed left wing artists/intellectuals made these films and have not made much effort to romanticize class struggle in the interests of more timid or less conscious audiences. In some cases this presents problems with using a film as an educational or organizing tool in certain contexts in the USA. And care should be used. However, because of how they were made, they uncover and layout for observation the full brutality of this struggle between the owning class and those it exploits. The films share the crude energy and the human poignancy of the conflicts they portray and which have been part of class conscious filmmaking since the Soviet revolutionary filmmakers and the workers' film movements of the 1930s. Despite their scarce resources, these filmmakers use the full range of film techniques — drawing heavily on the various traditions of radical filmmaking: Vertov, Eisenstein, Evens, Godard, the Cubans. Solanas and Getino, and the rich developments of feminist filmmaking in the last decade.

The films show clearly the stifled lives, the community disintegration, and the thwarted imaginations of the oppressed. But by so doing, by getting inside the struggles, they also show us the incredible human potential and creativity rising up to face an arrogant capitalism, which must crush human life in order to maintain itself. We see many kinds of bravery: women coming to selfhood as a result of their involvement in strike support organizing; a young boy who buries his father with the most eloquent eulogy on film and then joins the local guerrilla band; Irish families who continue to organize services for the old and the young under the withering oppression of the English Army and grinding poverty; and all the singers and poets and leaders, risen up, out of the

people. All this creativity and change points with hope to the future.

All these films portray responses to imperialism in El Salvador. Canada, Ireland, and Guyana. They remind us again how dramatic, consistent, and important this struggle is, how much we can learn from it, how necessary for us and for them our support efforts are. North American and European wealth depends on the exploitation of these people. Their struggle for human dignity clears a path we will eventually follow, grateful to them for their pioneering effort.

These films, as do the struggles they present, have a lot to teach us about politics, filmmaking, and about life itself. The films both deserve our attention and reward that attention many times over.

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### Three films on El Salvador — Michael Chanan

According to the ruling military-Christian Democrat Junta in El Salvador and most of the international press to boot, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched a final offensive on 10 January 1981 and was defeated. Government forces, claimed the Junta, had within a few days gained control throughout the country, and the guerrillas were no longer in occupation anywhere. The claim was completely false. It was designed both to preempt and to disorient the media, who have continued schizophrenically to repeat that the FMLN final offensive was defeated while from time to time carrying reports from liberated zones, items on demoralization within the Junta's Army (a separate body from the crack National Guard), and other stories which shed doubt on the Junta's veracity.

The FMLN has said that it was a general, not a final, offensive. There has been some confusion about this since the FMLN did indeed speak of the offensive as the beginning of the final stage of the struggle, but a few days before it began — I was on my way to El Salvador to film a report for West German television — I was told by a spokesperson in Mexico of the united Salvadorean political opposition organization, the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front), that while every offensive aims to achieve the overthrow of the enemy regime, not every offensive gets that far. It was a realistic assessment. A couple of weeks later the FMLN estimated that the offensive had achieved 75% of its aims. Government forces had been placed on the defensive. In response to guerrilla occupations and actions in as many as forty different towns, the Junta had been forced to move reinforcements rapidly around the country only to find then in many instances pinned down in places from which they could not withdraw without the risk that the guerrillas would reoccupy. These occupations, carried out in conjunction with the revolutionary popular militia in each location, were not intended to be permanent. Rather they were designed in order to carry out acts of sabotage and preemptive attacks on military and police garrisons and to build the mobilization of the urban popular organizations toward the eventual tasks of insurrection.

Meanwhile, because of fear of ambush, the main highways remained largely unpatrolled, and the FMLN has remained in occupation of large liberated zones in each of the four fronts into which they have divided the country for strategic purposes. Even known points of entry to these liberated zones have gone unguarded while government forces are garrisoned, moving out only in very large numbers — as many as 5,000 troops at a time — to launch mostly ineffective invasions against guerrilla territory, although they've also been bombing FMLN strongholds which they cannot reach by land.

Five political-military organizations, each maintaining its own internal structure and chiefs-of-staff, make up the FMLN — named after the leader of the 1932 uprising in which 30,000 peasants were killed. The first of these organizations was set up in 1970. There is a joint chief-of-staff in each of the liberated zones which co-ordinates the actions of the different organizations in accordance with the United Revolutionary Directorate (DRU) which was set up a few months before the FMLN was created in October 1980.

The best definition of a liberated zone in El Salvador is one from which the fascist paramilitary organization Orden has been expelled. Orden (which means "Order" in Spanish) was set up in 1967 by the then-president and his security chief in order, in the words of its founders, "to organize the masses so as to control the masses" and "to provide the ideology of fascism with a mass base." Officially outlawed when the new junta took power in October 1979 after the overthrow of President Romero (no relation to the murdered archbishop), it quickly reformed under a new name. It is the implication of a large number of the country's senior military officials in this and other anticommunist paramilitary organizations and assassination squads which gives the lie to the moderate image which Washington has been trying to project of the junta.

Within the liberated zones, the entire population is organized to provide support for the FMLN's guerrilla army. But in both the countryside and in the towns and cities, corresponding to each of the politico-military organizations which make up the FMLN, there is a mass organization and a popular militia, through which the popular classes participate in the struggle. Just as the militia originated in the need for self-defense by the working class against military repression and the activities of the neofascists, so too the eventual task of the militia will be to lead the general strike at the moment of insurrection. This strong, extensive, and well-organized popular movement has been rendered all but completely invisible by the way the international mass media have reported from El Salvador. And yet only this can explain the fierceness and intensity of the struggle and the extremities the neo-fascists have been going to in the last two years.

Meanwhile, in the liberated zones, peasants who were previously seasonal day laborers, more out of work than in, now participate in collectives. They attend hospitals set up by the FMLN to care for

wounded fighters but which also offer the first health care known in the rural districts. The FMLN has also set up schools while men and women both participate in workshops in which they produce mines, grenades, and explosive charges of various kinds; repair arms; and make clothes and shoes. Children of both sexes are given all kinds of responsibilities in this kind of society.

All of these are things which I saw in the days following the launch of the general offensive when I entered a liberated zone in the region of San Vicente, about 60 km east of the capital, where Junta forces several times since then have suffered repulse. All the guerrillas I spoke to agreed that since the beginning of the offensive, the army has become severely demoralized. This was partly because a small but significant number of soldiers had deserted to join the guerrilla ranks (including a few officers) and partly because the army rank and file is made up of drafted peasants who are having to fight their own brothers and cousins. Without the highly trained National Guard at their shoulders, there is reason to suppose that they would no longer be prepared to fight.

Government assault forces also rely on the services of Orden, which provides much of their local military intelligence. Orden also mounts guard in civilian dress and with government arms at strategic targets for guerrilla sabotage and openly patrols in the cities. Orden and the National Guard rely in turn on the regiment of U.S. military advisors. On the first morning of the offensive I heard some of these advisors in the capital on Citizens' Band radio. They were clearly directing operations against the occupied popular neighborhoods. We heard one of them barking the instruction, "Get those press cards [journalists]. Get them out of here. They haven't heard the worst one."

The odds against an all-out victory by the FMLN last January were enormous. But the offensive did concentrate international attention on the situation and boost international solidarity. As the impersonation of a cowboy replaced the peanut vendor in the White House, the dangers of direct U.S. intervention seemed obviously to increase. Reagan and Haig announced changes in policy. Abandoning the notion that an official human rights policy would reestablish international respect for the United States, they launched a broadsided attack on something they called "international terrorism." Taking El Salvador as the test case and defining it in terms of an East/West conflict, which it is not. What they meant by international terrorism was the supposed aiding and abetting of left-wing freedom fighters by the Soviet Union through its supposed client states, Cuba and Nicaragua. They published documents which they claimed proved their case, but the envoys they sent abroad to persuade European and Latin American governments to back them persuaded nobody. This is because, as Saul Landau remarked in a recent interview (*Marxism Today*, June 1981), Haig resorted to a Lewis Carroll caricature and asserted in no uncertain terms that terrorism is what he says it is and not whatever anybody else might think.

Social Democrat governments in Europe stuck by their commitment to

the Salvadorean opposition organization, the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front), the body which corresponds to the FMLN on the political and diplomatic fronts, one of whose member parties is a member of the Socialist International (only the Tory government in Britain supports White House policy). As for Latin America, even right-wing military governments do not seem prepared to accept direct U.S. intervention in El Salvador. They know it could only result in the Vietnamization of the whole of Central America, with all the expectable repercussions in their own countries. In other words, the January offensive had demonstrated that there would be no easy military victory for imperialism in El Salvador, while international solidarity had created pressures, direct and indirect, that made the new president think twice about translating words into deeds.

Yet the danger of escalation is by no means over and in another sense the Vietnamization of El Salvador is already underway, even if it isn't yet direct intervention. As Saul Landau explained:

"I don't think in the near future, that is, before the election in 1982, that this administration is going to send troops anywhere, without there being some terrible emergency. I think the dispatching of U.S. troops to any foreign land would defeat the political plan to capture the Lower House in 1982. So I don't think he's going to do it. I do think he's going to revitalize the Nixon/Kissinger Vietnamization Plan. That's what we're seeing right now in El Salvador. Get these little "greaseball spicks" into shape, right. That's the order to the American military. Advisors, equipment, heavy training — get them into shape to fight a war — all the aircraft you need, all the mobile support, all the artillery that'll flow in. Then you'll have AID teams going in there to shore up the economy to make the government look attractive..."

This, then, and its implications, forms the current context of solidarity work and of any film designed to be used to mobilize support for the struggle in El Salvador.

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## *El Salvador: Revolution or Death* Oppression

by Peter Steven

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 20-21

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It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic title sequence for any film: a young man kneels on the pavement in the central square in San Salvador, dips his finger in the blood of a dead compatriot lying nearby, and quickly scrawls on the side of a building, "Revolution or Death."

In the forty-five minutes which follow, the full human and political meaning of that gesture become very clear — the present situation in El Salvador is at a critical point. Revolution has reached every corner of the country and has changed every Salvadorean's life crucially. At this moment in history there is no middle ground, one either supports the military junta or the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR).

Made in 1980, in El Salvador and Holland by a Dutch crew, *REVOLUTION OR DEATH* is a particularly important film for North Americans right now because it tackles head on the view of the U.S. administration and the mass media "interpretations," which have parroted that government position to the letter. Both the Carter and Reagan governments have argued that the problem in El Salvador is violence from the extreme left and right. They have stated that the new junta, which took power in November 1979, represents a moderate road that has the support of the majority of the people. The United Nations, the Salvadorian Catholic Church, and the testimony of the people in the film argue otherwise.

Contrary to the U.S. view, both the opposition groups and international observers state that the junta has the support of only a tiny class of landowners, literally known as the Fourteen Families, who have conspired with the right wing of the military and foreign capital to keep most of the country in a semi-feudal state for the past fifty years. Attempts to introduce even modest agrarian reform have met with a stonewall and increasing repression, and have led to the current revolutionary situation.

There was some hope in the early weeks of 1980 that the new military-civilian government would implement a plan for agrarian reform. Yet the reform, which was loudly touted in the U.S. press, was little more than a rural pacification program coupled with vicious repression of rural labor organizations. The U.S. architects of this program were the same advisers who had imposed the Phoenix pacification scheme in Vietnam in the 1960's.

Within a few weeks of the new junta, all but one of the civilian and moderate military members had resigned in disgust. Some immediately joined the revolutionary opposition. In April 1980, all the progressive mass organizations and political parties joined together to form the Democratic Revolutionary Front, and in November 1980, after a summer of major escalations in the conflict, all of the popular armed guerrilla and mass forces joined to form the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (the FMLN). Since the formation of the FDR-FMLN coalitions and the installation of the Reagan government, the greatest danger has been the possibility of a U.S.-sponsored invasion to prop up the faltering junta.

What makes this documentary so riveting are the obviously precarious conditions in which the filmmakers worked. The recorded footage is not a random documentation of demonstrations, comments from people on the street, urban violence, etc. Rather, much of what we see provides crucial historical evidence supporting the analysis originating from the democratic forces in El Salvador.

Of vital importance is a short interview with Oscar Romero, the late Archbishop of San Salvador, who strongly condemns the violence of the junta and the U.S. aid. Romero had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for his strong stance and had personally written Carter demanding an end to U.S. aid and military advisers. In March 1980, shortly after this interview, he was assassinated by a right wing death squad.

Immediately following the interview is a long sequence documenting the tragic funeral of the Archbishop. Several thousand mourners carrying palm leaves had gathered outside the cathedral to participate in the mass. But near the end of the ceremonies paramilitary troops set off a number of bombs and began firing into the crowd. It's during this incident that the young man seen in the title sequence writes the slogan in blood. Later footage shows hundreds of mourners coming out of the church with their hands above their heads, filing out of the square that is ringed with troops. All this time the camera has recorded the slaughter from within the crowds in the square and inside the cathedral.

At a news conference held by the junta the next day — also documented by the film — an official states that no troops were stationed in the square during the mass. Without need of narration, the filmmakers insert over his voice footage taken from the funeral showing troops on the rooftops around the square.

Following in the steps of the great Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens, who filmed in Spain, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China, these Dutch filmmakers have achieved a concrete act of solidarity with the people of a Third World country. The film is clear and partisan in its politics of support for the revolutionary forces. The narrator does not hide behind TV news conventions of "objectivity." At one point he calls the situation of the rural poor "disgraceful."

During the shooting of the film, the director, Frank Diamand, was interrogated by the National Guard. As he escaped from the barracks, they shot and wounded him but he managed to get away. Diamand and his crew had previously filmed in Vietnam and in Nicaragua just prior to the July 1979 victory of the Sandinistas. That film, NICARAGUA SEPTEMBER 1978, is especially powerful in its documentation of the guerrilla training camps, as the rebels prepare the last offensive against the Somoza regime.

REVOLUTION OR DEATH handles the conventions of political documentary extremely well, managing to document the recent events and provide the necessary background on the country's history and economics. But most importantly it translates on a strong emotional level the desperate situation and just cause of revolution in El Salvador.

A series of graphics and cartoon photomontages sketch in the country's history and economic structure and outline the program of the FDR. Using satiric and humorous drawings, photos and animation reminiscent of Monty Python (though with considerably more political edge), a narrator analyzes the power of the Fourteen Families, the events of the 1932 peasant uprising in which 30,000 people were killed, and the rapid series of events of 1980 which saw the murders of over 10,000 Salvadoreans by the army, the National Guard and the right-wing death squads.

REVOLUTION OR DEATH is exemplary filmmaking and well worth study by political documentarists. It keeps an authoritative narrator's voice to a minimum, allowing mise-en-scene and montage to carry many of the arguments. It has a great variety of sequences, carefully edited not only for clarity but to encourage real audience involvement. Such an involvement provides the basis for audiences to understand morally and politically the aims of the FDR.

One horrifying sequence requires only three shots. A young man of about 17 lies face down on the sidewalk with his hands tied by the thumbs behind his back, a National Guard with rifle standing over him. The cameraperson tentatively approaches: "¿Que pasó?" (What happened?). The boy says that he was simply walking down the street here where his aunt lives, and when he heard shots nearby, he panicked and ran. Shot two shows the boy now in the back of a National Guard truck surrounded by troops. The third shot from sometime later shows a crowd of people gathering around the mutilated body of the boy, which had been dumped in the street.

The filmmakers obviously have professional TV experience — they have an eye for the dramatic and moving image. But the filming style differs in two fundamental ways from standard TV news and documentary reportage. First, the camera crew records from among the people, literally taking the point of view of the demonstrators and the guerrillas. This has considerable impact on audiences who are used to seeing demonstrations from a camera positioned behind police lines. For example, a recent program on El Salvador aired in January '81, on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Fifth Estate came across as remarkably sympathetic to the aims of the revolutionary groups. Yet the manner of analyzing the situation was so dependent on the authoritative "Voice of God" narration and the testimony of expert observers that the real justice of the struggle was easily missed. In contrast, REVOLUTION OR DEATH derives tremendous power from the willingness of the filmmakers to get very close and involved with a variety of people and really listen to what they have to say.

A scene that is repeated with a number of variations shows a group of Salvadoreans standing in a circle in a street, or outside a factory, or in a small village, recounting details of the current events. As one person takes a turn speaking, the others listen carefully, nodding their heads in assent. The director has not rushed these scenes — he has concentrated on documenting the sad but determined expressions on people's faces. Most of the people who speak are clearly not well educated. They tend to speak quietly, some almost softly, but they are very clear and firm about their politics: "The junta has treated the farmers' organizations barbarously." "The agrarian reform is nothing but a sham."

For Salvadoreans in the audience, REVOLUTION OR DEATH may not be particularly informative since the political analysis in the film is quite general. [\[1\]](#) Nonetheless, REVOLUTION OR DEATH should be used as an organizing tool throughout North America. DEC Films, who distribute the film in Canada, report that it has been widely used for fundraising by various El Salvador support committees. It works particularly well as an introduction to the role of the U.S. in Central America,

Again, the great value of EL SALVADOR: REVOLUTION OR DEATH lies in its clear argument against the interpretations of the U.S. media and State Department. This alternative to the dominant media is crucial at this point since the FDR urgently needs international recognition and support as it begins its last offensive against the junta.

## Notes

[1.](#) Fortunately, a videotape made in Costa Rica, entitled A CASE FOR EL SALVADOR, fills this gap and has been enthusiastically viewed by many Salvadoreans in Toronto. The videotape goes into much more detail about the internal politics of El Salvador and Central America and discusses more rigorously the politics of the various mass organizations which comprise the FDR.

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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## *El Salvador: The People Will Win* Resistance

by Michael Chanan

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 21-23

copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1981, 2005

A group of shots intercut with the credits at the end of *EL SALVADOR, EL PUEBLO VENCERÁ* (*EL SALVADOR, THE PEOPLE WILL WIN*, El Salvador, 1981) shows a figure emerging into a clearing carrying a 16mm Arriflex camera. He carefully places it in a basket of clothing which a peasant woman has waiting and which, after covering the camera, she lifts onto her head and carries off. In terms of simple denotation, these pictures indicate the conditions under which various parts of the film were shot: the scenes in the interior of the country where the normal conveniences of filmmaking, like cars and trucks, were unavailable. At the same time, they symbolize the necessary cooperation in making the film between the filmmakers and the nameless peasants of the country's liberated zones in the hills of El Salvador, where peasant struggle has a rich and long history. These are the people who provide the support system for the FMLN and from among whom the combatants of the FMLN are overwhelmingly recruited. These pictures of a woman and a camera among the closing credits therefore become, amid the names of collaborators and testimonials to fallen comrades, a further imprint of authorship. They say: "Also made with the help of many people who must remain anonymous."

It can be said that films are always made with people who remain anonymous, because filmmaking always involves a certain kind of anonymity on the part of the majority of filmmakers. The long list of names which form the credits of a film mean nothing to the vast majority, probably 99%, of the people who watch the film. But in this film the credits draw attention to themselves. And when the anonymous cameraman appears on the screen together with an anonymous peasant woman, with another anonymous cameraman behind the camera which is showing us this image, the sense of anonymity acquires a new dimension. Many of the names in the credits are pseudonyms, the *nombres de guerra* of the liberation fighter, and they're clearly indicated as such. Because of this, the anonymity of those we don't see but whose presence we feel in the usual indications of authorship which

a film manifests, this anonymity is redoubled and merges with that of all those whom we do see but who remain nameless. What comes to be symbolized in the closing credit sequence is that all together are the collective authors of the film (together with the dead as well), just as they will all become the collective authors of the victory they're fighting for. The film is part of this struggle, an instrument.

It is produced by the Instituto de Cine Salvadoreño Revolucionario (Revolutionary Salvadorean Film Institute), an organization of the FDR.

Not that this film institute is simply a servicing unit, a public relations body, for not only has it undertaken a program of film production to promote solidarity outside the country, it has also embarked on the use of film and audiovisual media with El Salvador itself, in parts of the liberated zones, for the purposes of political education. The Revolutionary Salvadorean Film Institute belongs squarely to the history of involvement of film as a powerful protagonist of anti-imperialist struggle throughout America, demanding and forging political and cultural self-expression for the entire continent. It joins a roll call that begins in 1956 with the film school set up at the University of Santa Fe by Fernando Birri and continues with the Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC, set up in 1959; with Ukamau in Bolivia; and with Chile Films under Allende between 1970 and 1973; and which now includes INCINE, the film institute set up in Nicaragua by the Frente Sandinista and incorporating the filmmakers who had filmed the insurrection. The Salvadoreans have gone a step further and are not just using film within the struggle but have set up their film institute even before victory. They have been able to do this because the New Latin American Cinema movement, to which this film belongs as much as it belongs to the Salvadorean people, is wedded to the principles of internationalism. THE PEOPLE WILL WIN was made through international cooperation between militant filmmakers in several Latin American countries. It is directed — perhaps this is especially apt — by a Puerto Rican, Diego de la Texera.

The film is an invitation to its audience to identify with its collective authorship and symbolically to join in the struggle of the people of El Salvador. Symbolically, because this is the level on which art does its work, including political art, and this is a film made with great artistry. Symbolically, however, not in a passive sense but by inviting the acts of solidarity in which we express identification with anti-imperialist struggle, symbolic acts which may produce highly practical results as they did in the case of the war in Vietnam. A film contributes to building such a movement because it gathers an audience, it enters the process of mobilization.

Liberal detractors of political films often declare that they only preach to the converted. But even the converted need to be informed. There are also many people apt to express their solidarity because their human instinct tells them to, who are nevertheless horribly confused by the pile of disinformation poured out by the mass media. They know they're

confused, like the old lady in a recent cartoon by Jules Feiffer, sitting in front of her television screen. She says:

"The media told us that the Vietcong didn't have a lot of support among the population, that the Zimbabwean guerrillas didn't have a lot of support among the population, and that the shah of Iran had a lot of support among the population. But the media tells us that the rebels in El Salvador don't have a lot of support among the population. Beware of the media. It screws up our capacity to think straight."

In face of this disinformation the film presents — among other things — an account of recent political history in El Salvador. This, in order to counter the silence and the active misrepresentation of the imperialist media in regard not only to the enormous popular base which exists for the FMLN but also the process of unification that has gone on among all progressive forces in the country, in opposition to the Military-Christian Democrat Junta now headed, after cosmetic treatment in the Washington style, by a civilian president, Jose Napoleon Duarte.

Duarte is represented in the mass media according to the official Washington line as a moderate — the military once prevented his taking office after an election victory — caught between the two extremes of left and right. After seeing this film he will be understood, without ambiguity, as leader of the civilian extreme right, the man who moved into the junta when the rest of the civilian politicians left it because the neo-fascist military refused to budge, even just a little to please their paymasters north of the Rio Grande.

The film tells us of the creation of the FDR and the way it brings together the gamut of revolutionary and progressive forces in the country in a unified organization with a single program, whose first objective is the overthrow of the junta and all it stands for. The basis of the FDR program is the recognition — shared by the progressive church — of the people's right to armed struggle to overthrow the regime and of the FMLN as the military force conducting this struggle. Hence there is no political distinction to be made about this film as to whether it follows the line of the FDR or the FMLN. It is not a question of the revolutionary Marxism of the FMLN being toned down to suit the FDR's social democratic objectives. What the film shows is that a process of political polarization has taken place in El Salvador, which has radicalized the bourgeois politicians at the same time as forging unity across the entire left.

What has happened in El Salvador in this respect is a model for us in the neo-imperialist metropolis. The process has equally radicalized the Communist party and the leftist groups who previously held sectarian positions — frequently of the same kind that are still held by some of our own Trotskyist or post-Maoist grouplets, who insist on declaring that the Salvadorean Revolution lies in danger of betrayal because, they roundly accuse, of approaches made by the FDR for negotiations. This is

errant nonsense, an instance of what Sartre called "lazy Marxism," which stems from a completely undialectical conception of reality. And in the end, it is no better than Sartre's example of the Hungarian Communist party official in the fifties who proclaimed Budapest's subsoil to be counterrevolutionary because it wouldn't permit the construction of a subway.

Because of the complexity of this recent history, the political sections of the film are difficult to digest. But the presentation of any such material without loss of clarity is a very difficult thing indeed. In spite of structural problems, *THE PEOPLE WILL WIN* is a paradigm of the kind of film which has come to be known in the new Latin American cinema as the film of combat — *cine de combate* or *cine militante*. Conceived on a large scale — the film runs eighty minutes — this paradigmatic quality is evident from the incisiveness of the very first moments, a quality that is pretty well sustained in the varieties and contrasts of style which the film goes through. As in all films of this kind, where the pressing need to communicate a political content comes before the formal criteria of aesthetics, the stylistic variety of the film is in the first place a matter of necessity, not design.

For example, images of certain events which the film needs to picture are available to the filmmakers only on videotape, and they do not hesitate to use them, though the transfer of video image to film is imperfect. But the filmmakers have succeeded in dominating their material. They have given significance even to the imperfection of the image. They have made it signify not only their own urgency but also something about the way the images they bring to us have arrived on our screens. In more formal terms, they have found imaginative ways of incorporating the texture of these video images so as to give them a plastic quality that enriches rather than impairs the overall texture of the film. The shaky and lined images of the massacre in front of the cathedral at the funeral of the assassinated Archbishop Romero are artistically contrasted with the fresh colors, clean lines, and controlled filming of the drawings used to accompany the ballad which narrates the life of Farabundo Marti, the leader of the 1932 uprising killed in the course of its brutal repression when the military in El Salvador first came to power: Farabundo Marti, after whom the united forces of the National Liberation Front have named themselves.

The music in this film is in many ways quite extraordinary. Composed by the Argentinian Adrian Goizneta working with a group of Costa Rican musicians, it comprises film music of an almost unique kind. The number of politically progressive documentaries with specially composed music has always been very small. Pare Lorentz found the resources to get Virgil Thompson to write his marvelous score for *THE PLOUGH THAT BROKE THE PLAINS* (USA, 1936) but independent cinema over the intervening decades has rarely been able to include such resources. Moreover, motivated increasingly by critical distrust of the uses of music in commercial cinema and television documentary, there has been a tendency instead to use only music recorded live during

the filming, if there is such, or else only period popular song, usually carefully selected and arranged in the interests of authenticity. On the other hand, Cuban political documentary has developed other paradigmatic uses of music, which are the ones adopted here.

Because of this, the music in this film may come as an awkward surprise among various audiences. The viewer may not readily grasp how much music serves as a leading, not merely an accompanying, even counterpointed, voice in the film. There are moments when the music prefigures the narration and where it explains aspects of the image to which the narration refers. This music, too, stakes out the film's claim as a piece of work within the contemporary tradition of political art in Latin America. It's not merely a matter of style, such as the use of elements from Latin American popular music. I cannot say whether it was consciously and deliberately done or not — I suspect that it was — but in the latter part of the film, I heard a pattern of intervals in the music which seemed to be quoted from the cantata, *Santa Maria de Iquique*, by the Chilean political song group Quilapayán, a work composed in the folk idiom at the time of Popular Unity to commemorate the massacre of mineworkers and their families perpetrated in the interests of foreign capitalism in 1906.

The video, the drawings, the further footage borrowed from other sources, all serve as contextualization and preparation for the directly filmed sequences which in many ways constitute the heart of the film. There is above all the sequence towards the end in which a young boy at a burial in a country clearing bewails the death of his father at the hands of the military, declares at the graveside that the only way to avenge the murder is to join the liberation struggle, and is then presented with the red kerchief and insignia of the rebel militia. The sequence is neither sensational nor rhetorical but deeply moving and, for the observant viewer, packed with detail. Particularly to be noticed is the way the adults gently encourage the boy, dropping into a familiarity that in no way destroys the solemnity of the occasion. Perhaps this is what many viewers of this film in our own countries may find the most striking thing about it: that in this struggling society, fighting for its very survival, children are treated as whole and responsible persons, with minds and wills of their own, fully capable and entitled to devote their slender lives to the cause of liberation.

Not the least thing about this strangely lyrical sequence is that the camerawork in it is particularly intelligent. The camera is neither too distant nor too close. Handheld, among the mourners at the funeral and the witnesses of the boy's initiation, it is evidently — judging from the way the boy himself at one moment glances at it — completely trusted. When this film has been more widely seen, this sequence will, I'm certain, be recognized as a paradigmatic piece of engaged documentary. Many such films fail, with the best of intentions, to present their subjects as more than stereotypes. But not here.

On the other hand, the film is pitched emotionally very high. I don't

know exactly how this goes over in North America but in Europe it presents certain difficulties — at least for the film sophisticates who mediate the consumption of film in our societies (including many who write and read leftist film journals). The difficulty was apparent at Pesaro in Italy last June, where the festival was devoted entirely to Latin American cinema and *THE PEOPLE WILL WIN* was thus seen in good company. But the festival produced a clash, a failure on the part of the Italian critical fraternity in their daily reviews to understand the imperatives of the New Latin American Cinema (this being only the most immediate sign of the hard time Latin American filmmakers have had in Europe). The denunciation of the Italian critics by the festival's director, Lino Miccich, repeated on the last night by a representative of the dozens of Latin American filmmakers present, Walter Achugar, must be gauged by the political atmosphere in Italy. To balance the presence of the intellectual-cultural left, Pesaro was also playing host on the festival weekend to a military parade. In the square outside the festival cinema there was a procession of veterans commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of a regiment which had fought in the Mussolini-Fascists' foreign campaigns in North Africa and Europe. The scene was a reminder of the real alignment of political forces behind the images on the cinema screen: humanity versus fascism.

The Italian critics complained of rhetoric in the Latin American film. The complaint was thrown back in their faces. What it comes down to is this: if Latin American films are often rhetorical, and if this rhetoric sometimes misses its target a little, the political imperatives which give rise to it are nonetheless the most authentic and legitimate and of historic proportions, with the consequence that to dismiss them as mere rhetoric says more about the critic who does so than about the film. In none of the films on show at Pesaro was the essential urgency of the rhetoric of Latin American cinema as obvious as in *THE PEOPLE WILL WIN*.

If it seems misplaced to talk about the plasticity and texture of images which show such scenes as the mass of people attending the funeral of their murdered archbishop themselves being massacred, the justification for this lies in the creative intelligence of the film itself, which makes its rhetoric so eloquent. The source of this intelligence flows through the filmmakers' rejection of mechanical and utilitarian notions of what political films should consist. These notions are symptoms of a dissociation of sensibility which is fundamentally European in origin. Latin American filmmakers have sometimes employed recent European paradigms uncritically, partly because of the force of European cultural models as an alternative to the populist (as opposed to popular) forms of the dominant cultural imperialism of the United States. But a film like this one, which leaves these models behind, shows them up as sterile symptoms of the very cultural alienation they mean to oppose.

Alienation is, among other things, a fear of emotion. Artistic expression cannot succeed in mobilizing the beholder if it entertains this fear but

only if it works to overcome it. (How much of Hollywood does that, I wonder?) It's a matter not of what goes on at the surface of the film. It is rather a way of earning the viewer's trust and not, for example, throwing at the audience a welter of undifferentiated and therefore emotionally numbing images, as certain kinds of pictures from El Salvador which form the stock in trade of the mass media are bound to appear at first sight. The filmmakers' intentions must be to integrate the variety of material in a way that combines feeling with thought and thought with feeling. The viewer need not be consciously aware of the integration of perception in this process. It doesn't matter. Aesthetic perception is not the same as theoretical understanding. Theoretical intelligence analyzes; aesthetic intelligence synthesizes.

This film is indeed a highly synthesizing piece of work. And in more senses than one. Directed towards the fullest possible integration within a political process, it has been given a mobile form — again in more senses than one: I have seen it now three times over the space of eight months and each time I've seen a different version. This reworking of the film represents a healthy disregard on the part of the filmmakers for the idea that a film has to have a definitive original form. (Where does such an idea come from, anyway?) They clearly see this film in terms of the dynamic of the revolutionary process it belongs to and have therefore been concerned to improve its political efficacy by introducing changes where necessary. Whatever weaknesses it may have, this film is alive: it therefore asks not to be reduced to a text but to be viewed, and used, in the same spirit as the one in which it has been made.

### *El Salvador: Portrait of a Liberated Zone* Liberation

by Margaret Henry

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 23

copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1981, 2005

This film is more important than it may first appear to be. It is a gentle film, shot during the early days of the FMLN's general offensive this January. It is primarily a political film that shows us aspects of the military situation, gives economic and sociological information, and presents an analysis of current forces in the context of the history and growth of the people's form of revolutionary struggle. Made in a short period of time, it is a film which knows its limitations and transcends them.

It is the day-to-day, quiet side of struggle; it is the heat, the debris of war, the fat-bellied unwell children, the painstaking cottage industry of making explosives ("... and this is the sawdust sunning itself, because it has to be dry to mix properly with the other materials"). It is women carefully folding tortillas in banana leaves, the ill-equipped field hospital becoming a first local clinic, and instructors using sticks to train the army. It is the wavering songs by which recent heroes are remembered, the melodies of grief and courage among fighters who are very young, very poor, very beautiful, very serious.

The speakers, casual and calm in a manner lost to metropolitan life, are grounded in a practice through which they have made their own authority. It exists as much in the song of a young boy as in the historical narration by Cayetano Carpio, so gentle in rhythm and tone as to be more like poetry than analysis.

At the beginning of the film we see pieces of pottery illustrating everyday scenes, including lovemaking, and with this we hear the first "voice" of El Salvador — the voice of a guitar. As Carpio begins to speak of the necessities of existence in which the struggle originates, we have the beginning of another dimension of the film. With humility and respect, Carpio honors the people and the organic development of their means of struggle. Speaking of the thirties, he tells how "Farabundo Marti headed the working masses and all honest persons in a struggle against oppression." Carpio is a baker, a military leader, and a poet. Although

materially deprived and devastated by repression, the Salvadoreans we see in this film all share through their culture and struggle the same certainty and calm that Carpio has in his knowledge, experience, and practice. It is through the daily hardship and labor of these anonymous people that the revolution is created.

We can find further intimations of the cultural texture of this life in the four sounds in the film which, if sometimes toneless and halting, are always actively meaningful. In them, as Amilcar Cabral encouraged, "we may consider the national liberation movement as the organized political expression of the culture of the people who are undertaking the struggle." [\[1\]](#) We see too "that the armed liberation struggle is not only a product of culture but also a *determinant of culture*." [\[2\]](#)

What the songs do in the film reveals what they do in the community. The first song is ironic. It sings of "How beautiful is democracy in this lovely country," gives some sordid examples, and speaks of "gentlemen above [who] think in English while they speak in Spanish." By reworking other visual and verbal information we have had about the relation between the U.S. and Latin America, the song shifts our attention from information to experience.

The singers, like all others in the film except Carpio, are not named. Anonymity here, consistent with its value in FMLN revolutionary ideology, enables us to identify not with individuals but with their experience and activity. Anonymity does not suppress the individual; it embodies him/her as part of the community. It also allows us to see how profound the relation is between individual experience, cultural expression, and political consciousness.

This anonymity ends with death. We do not see death, but we hear about it. The other three songs are about people who have died. Here they are remembered by name, their actions identified with them as individuals. In song a young man is creating the community's memory of some of its members: a fellow fighter, a civilian, a child, a loved priest in his last moments "praying for all the oppressed, searching for their freedom." With these words the camera brings us to the graceful movements of women folding tortillas within green banana leaves. Then the song refocuses on life and on the fight for a future. Another sings, "This song ... has been made for after the Revolution." Those who have died have done so in a manner continuous with the lives of their comrades, as are the singers in their songs and as is the film in its seeing — the community of struggle is the people's culture.

Pain — as in the field operation and the child having a wound tended — is silent. For her, an apple for after.

In the metropolitan countries we can see this film in two contexts: television documentaries and films like EL SALVADOR: THE PEOPLE WILL WIN (EL PUEBLO VENCERÁ), a co-production made with the help of the Salvadoreans themselves (reviewed above). PORTRAIT OF A LIBERATED ZONE is productively complementary to the latter.

The TV documentaries on El Salvador, some of them good television reportage, are rapidly produced, riskily filmed, and gory — with footage among the most shocking of the past year's deluge of catastrophes. With many mutilated bodies and a narration which is thin on political comprehension, they provide the "human rights" visceral shock treatment. These are films about violence, death, poverty, utter brutality, and hopelessness. They are overwhelmed by a horror which cannot anchor itself. They look at suffering more than at the struggle for change.

These TV documentaries have an important role to play, but Chanan and Chappell work both literally and conceptually from within the revolutionary process. Though low key, the film conveys the sense of time, the seriousness, and the certainty which the struggle itself creates.

### Notes

[1.](#) "National Liberation and Culture" (a speech given in 1970), in *Return to the Source*, ed. African Information Service (New York: Monthly Review Press. 1973), pp. 43-44.

[2.](#) Ibid., p. 55.

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## *Attack on the Americas!* Counterrevolution

by Ruth McDonough Fitzpatrick

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 24

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We are grateful to NACLA and Ruth McDonough Fitzpatrick for their permission to reprint a shortened version of this article which, originally appeared in NACLA's *Report on the Americas* (Mar-Apr, 1981).

The American Security Council (ASC), not to be confused with the National Security Council, recently released *ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS!*, a made-for-television film decrying the "red menace" next door. The film is part of a \$5,000,000 television campaign called Project Survival, whose stated intention is to "waken and activate all Americans for a change in U.S. defense policy." *ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS!*, previewed in December at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, will be offered by the ASC to all commercial stations in the country. As the film's sponsor, the Coalition for Peace Through Strength, an ASC spin-off, states: "The objective is at least five showings in each of the more than 200 television market areas."

Lest this goal not be taken seriously, Project Survival's first film, *THE SALT SYNDROME*, has been televised over 2,000 times by local stations nationwide. This film was so inaccurate and biased that the Pentagon itself was led to officially refute its content. *WAR WITHOUT WINNERS*, the impressive anti-nuclear-war film by the Center for Defense Information, was prompted by the extensive airing of *THE SALT SYNDROME*.

### RIGHT-WING TV

The original working title of *ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS!* was *CARIBBEAN PEARL HARBOR*. According to the ASC, the film

"reports on the Brezhnev-Castro drive to turn the Caribbean into a Soviet lake by a combination of Communist-sponsored revolution and U.S. government opposition to anti-

communist leadership in the area."

The film argues for U.S. support to unpopular military dictatorships in El Salvador, Guatemala, and elsewhere in the Americas. It claims, despite widespread findings to the contrary by international organizations, church groups, and the U.S. government, that these governments have not violated human rights. The film concludes with a plea for increased military strength in order to protect the United States' geopolitical and economic interests in Central America and the Caribbean.

Biased and distorted, ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! is such a poorly done film that even a member of Congress who agreed with its message noted, "It is not as well done as THE SALT SYNDROME," Already shown at least thirty times on public television, the film has been temporarily withdrawn for revisions, but a massive campaign of cross-country television showings is planned for April.

Could another reason for the film's withdrawal be that copies are busy being shown to incoming Reagan administration personnel and new members of Congress?

#### THE AMERICAN SECURITY COUNCIL

ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! was produced by the American Security Council Foundation for the Coalition of Peace Through Strength, a bipartisan alliance of 177 national organizations, 230 members of Congress, and other pro-defense leaders across the country. According to many, the American Security Council is the military-industrial complex, which President Eisenhower explicitly warned against in his farewell address.

Leadership of the ASC and its incestuously close relatives, the Center for Strategic and International Studies of Georgetown University and the Coalition for Peace Through Strength include numerous retired high-ranking military men (including a number of former chiefs of staff), prime defense contractors, and hard-line anticommunist politicians, as well as a number of former CIA and other intelligence personnel — in short all the "good old boys" cold warriors.

General Electric, among other corporations, is a member of the ASC. Remember Ronald Reagan selling GE products years ago on your television screen? Today we have a president, a secretary of state, and an ambassador to the United Nations "brought to you by ASC." In fact, Ronald Reagan, Alexander Haig, and Jeane Kirkpatrick are all featured prominently in ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS!

Running its National Security Academy in Washington, D.C., and courses for credit through Georgetown University's School for Summer and Continuing Education, the ASC's central headquarters are on an old rolling estate in Boston, Virginia. Here the ASC plays computerized war games, holds national security seminars and meetings on grounds

complete with a small landing field, and runs a large printing plant and mass-mailing facility, a private library, and ultramodern computerized offices. Having attempted to obtain Senator McCarthy's old lists among others, the ASC is also reputed to have the largest list of "subversives" in the country.

Lest the ASC lose members to a nuclear war, it provides a study on "how to maximize your chances for surviving nuclear war using tools and equipment to be found around the average home" called *Nuclear War Survival Skills*.

## THE COUNTERATTACK

Measures to counter ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! were small initially but are growing, bubbling up here and there. In January, the Center for New Creation, a small justice and peace center "for northern Virginia and beyond," invited a group of human rights activists from the religious, political, educational, and grass-roots sectors in Washington, D.C., to view the film. Appalled by what they saw, those gathered formed the ad hoc Coalition for Human Rights in Central America. As Marie Grasso, a founder of the coalition, stated,

"We viewed ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! and found it biased in the extreme. Many members of this coalition have had personal experiences in the Caribbean, particularly in Central America; and their regular communication with the struggling poor in Latin America paints an entirely different picture."

Composed of over twenty-five individuals and Washington-based organizations, the ad hoc coalition asked the Center for New Creation to develop an information packet to critique the film, provide background information on the ASC, and supply information on the Fairness Doctrine plus a list of alternative films and other resources to counter the film's perversions. A letter signed by the participating individuals and groups was also sent to those television stations who have shown or intend to show ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! demanding that, under the Fairness Doctrine, they air an alternative viewpoint. The Fairness Doctrine, an FCC provision, requires stations to air opposing views on public issues.

The Center for New Creation's information packet includes a critique of the film prepared by Phillip Wheaton, director of EPICA. As Wheaton points out:

"The film has a double message or argument ... [first] a rhetorical, redbaiting warning against the steadily growing and intentional strategy of the Soviet Union to take over the Caribbean basin and to march inexorably northward through Central America, country by country, until they are at our border. Thus the Americas are 'under siege' and through Cuban intervention, the Soviets intend to 'slash' the

Americas in half. The second message is an attack on the Carter administration's human rights philosophy as naive."

"The primary distortion," Wheaton observes, is that "there is neither recognition nor analysis" of the social inequities which are the cause of the social upheavals in Central America and the Caribbean, nor that these inequities are due to the oppressive and exploitive role of the ruling classes in specific countries.

One glaring example of the type of distortions that run throughout the film is a scene in which the voiceover decries the sufferings of the people caused by communist guerrilla terrorists while showing the well-known news footage of the government massacre of mourners at the funeral of Archbishop Romero killed a year ago this March 24th in El Salvador.

Although the ASC film deals with other Central American and Caribbean countries, the Coalition for Human Rights in Central America considers Glen Silber's EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM? to be an excellent partial response to ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! All twenty-six Public Broadcasting System (PBS) stations around the country have the Silber film, and the coalition urges people to call their local PBS station to express interest in broadcasting (or re-broadcasting) EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM?

With John A. Bushnell, acting deputy assistant of state for inter-American affairs, complaining that reporters are overplaying their accounts of El Salvador developments, the White House opposing Bushnell's view, President Reagan denying comparisons between El Salvador and Vietnam, and with the U.S. sending advisers to El Salvador, it appears that ATTACK ON THE AMERICAS! is indeed helping to make truth the first casualty of war.

## Notes

Requests for the information packet plus endorsements of the coalition's letter should be sent to the Center for New Creation, P.O. Box 1061, Vienna, VA 22180. Prepayment of \$7.00 includes postage. Additional signees to the coalition letter are encouraged and desired. A copy of the letter is included in the packet.

For information on EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM? contact Catalyst Media, P.O. Box 640, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Selected resources on El Salvador

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 24

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Regular coverage of and special publications on events in El Salvador increase every day. More and more people are becoming involved in the campaign to support the people of El Salvador in their struggle against a vicious ruling class kept in power by U.S. aid. Here we are presenting only the most important sources of information and organized support.

CISPES (The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador) has organized much of the national and local support work, although many other political, church, and labor groups are also involved. You can reach CISPES national office at P.O. Box 12056, Washington, D.C., 20005 — (202) 887-5019.

*The Guardian, An Independent Radical Newsweekly*, gives regular coverage of the revolution in El Salvador and published a special 12-page insert, "El Salvador: The Struggle for Freedom" last spring. Subs \$23 (+\$5 Canada and abroad), 3 month trial \$3. 33 West 17th Street, NY, NY, 10011.

*The Nation*, a left-liberal newsweekly, has also covered the revolution on a regular basis and has made two special issues available at bulk rates: *El Salvador: The Roots of Intervention* (10 copies \$8) and *Penny Lernouz on Latin America* (10 copies \$8). Subs \$30, 72 Fifth Ave., NY, NY, 10011.

NACLA (The North American Congress on Latin America) has for 15 years provided excellent coverage of the political economy of the Americas. Their *Report on the Americas* comes out every two months and they have done three recent issues focusing on El Salvador — *El Salvador: Why Revolution?* (#802), *El Salvador: A Revolution Brews* (#804), and the May-June, 1981 issue, *Central America: No Road Back*. These back issues cost \$3. Subs \$15. 151 West 19th Street, NY, NY, 10011.

The U.S.-El Salvador Research and Information Center has just begun publishing *El Salvador Bulletin*. Now coming out monthly, they hope to go bi-monthly soon. Subs \$10. P.O. Box 4797, Berkeley, CA, 94704.

A great source of pamphlets, buttons, posters, T-shirts, stickers, etc. is Solidarity Publications, P.O. Box 40874, San Francisco, CA, 94140.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR (Central America Solidarity Committee, Costa Rica/El Salvador, 1980, 3/4 inch video, 30 min). Distribution: DEC.

EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM (Glen Silber, USA, 1981 — first version: 3/4 inch video, color, 60 min; update: both 16mm and 3/4 inch video). Distribution: Icarus Films and DEC.

EL SALVADOR: THE PEOPLE WILL WIN (Diego de la Texera, El Salvador, 1980, 16mm, color. 64 min). Distribution: Unifilm, DEC, and The Other Cinema.

EL SALVADOR: PORTRAIT OF A LIBERATED ZONE (Michael Chanan and Peter Chapell, England, 1981, 16mm, color, 64 min). Distribution: The Other Cinema and DEC.

EL SALVADOR: REVOLUTION OR DEATH (Frank Diamand, Holland, 1980, 16mm, color. 48 mm). Distribution: Unifilm, DEC, and The Other Cinema.

SEEDS OF LIBERTY (Glen Silber, USA, 1981, 16mm, color, 28 min). Distribution: Mary Knoll and DEC.

### **Distributors' Addresses:**

DEC, 121 Avenue Road, Toronto, Ont., M5R 2G3, Canada.

The Other Cinema, 79 Wardour Street, London W1V 3TH, England.

Icarus Films, 200 Park Ave. South, Rm. 1319 New York, NY, 10016.

Unifilm, 419 Park Ave. South, New York, NY, 10003 or 1550 Bryant Street, San Francisco CA 94103.

Mary Knoll, Media Relations, Mary Knoll, NY, 10545.

### *Une Histoire de femmes: A Wives Tale* Women unite during strike

by Barbara Halpern Martineau

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 25

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"As the women became increasingly involved in the strike, they questioned more and more their traditional supportive role. This provoked many heated discussions among the women and obviously not without upsetting husband, family, union — and company."

"This situation forced us as filmmakers to find a cinematic approach that could capture this reality. It is difficult (impossible) to take 'pretty pictures' under these conditions: kitchens are small and don't well suit the movements of a film crew; children scream and cry in the microphone, making it hard to hear..."

"...we often packed up our equipment and decided not to shoot because we felt it would be a betrayal of the trust we had established with the women. You may perhaps be disappointed not to witness a family feud..."

"So we shot a film that doesn't in fact show 'everything,' hoping that what is not obvious comes from between the lines, between each frame of the film."

"The strike lasted eight and a half months. We stayed four and a half months in Sudbury, living with strikers' families. We returned six months later to "finish" A WIVES' TALE. Later still we returned to show the wives the film. They voted unanimously to release it."

— the filmmakers: Sophie Bissonette, Martin Duckworth, Joyce Rock

Inco, Ltd. is a multinational which owns and operates the nickel mines in Sudbury, Ontario. As an employer and as an environmental influence. Inco's record is impressively atrocious — a paradigm of patriarchal

capitalism. The smokestacks of Inco belch polluting agents into the air, resulting in acid rain across the province. Men die in the mines. Women live lives of patient desperation caring for, fearing for, and fearing the miners ("he's not always easy to live with"), raising future miners and miners' wives. And the Board of Directors annually raises the required profit margin for the company. There is some change as the world turns — now a few women are employed in the mines (30 out of 11,700), and recently one of those women died in a foundry accident. Equality of opportunity.

A WIVES' TALE is a 73-minute film about the women who supported the 1978 strike of the Sudbury miners against Inco. It is the most ambitious labor film to be shot in Canada in recent years, certainly the most ambitious in English-speaking Canada since the early days of Evelyn and Lawrence Cherry [\[1\]](#) and their agrarian populist films of the forties in Regina. Although shot in Sudbury, A WIVES' TALE is not an English Canadian production. Sudbury, Ontario, has a large francophone population, a fact strongly reflected in the structure of the film. A WIVES' TALE is a bilingual film, released first in French in Montreal, and very much in the tradition of militant Québec cinema — the executive producer was Arthur Lamonthe, [\[2\]](#) whose film LE MEPRIS N'AURA QU'UN TEMPS (HELL NO LONGER) remains a landmark of radical documentary. However, unlike most Québec militant films and unlike most labor-oriented documentaries made in English in Canada and elsewhere, A WIVES' TALE is preeminently, self-consciously, happily, and proudly a feminist film, insisting on the priority of women's experience and women's wide-ranging voices and visions as its perspective on the strike.

The Inco strike made labor history in Canada. It was originally provoked by the company in order to dispose of a nickel stockpile, on the evident assumption that a few months on picket lines would deplete the union treasury and the energies of the workers so that they would crawl back to work whenever into offered some paltry concessions. This did not happen — the strikers held out for eight and a half months, until they were offered a contract that made the strike worthwhile. The main reason they were able to hold out for so long was that they were solidly backed by the Wives Supporting the Strike Committee. The Wives raised money for special needs; organized a Christmas party that gave out 10,000 toys; held suppers and sales; ran a thrift shop; developed a clear analysis of the reasons for the strike; and gave financial, emotional, and physical support, which for once they themselves understood to be invaluable. The most important accomplishment of the women who organized in Sudbury, as their experience is presented by the film, was the validation of the work women do, and the skills women have, and the right of women to speak on their own behalf. The most difficult challenge for the filmmakers, aside from the usual impossible hardships faced by radical artists here and everywhere, was to make this self-validation interesting and accessible on film.

Mines and foundries make wonderful material for film documentarians

— the colors and sounds of the molten metal, the awesome machinery, the physical courage of the workers daring the fury of the elements. How to move from this audio/visual spectacle to the subject matter of A WIVES' TALE — two or three women arguing around a kitchen table about how far they can press their desire to be kept informed about strike matters and have their say about issues which directly affect their lives? One solution found by the filmmakers was simply to juxtapose these disparate elements — near the end of the film, when the strike is over, one of the woman is shown doing her laundry, "helped" by her toddling child. As she reaches for the controls of the washing machine, the scene cuts to one of the most dramatic sequences of the film, starting in the foundry, ending with a shot of molten metal streaming golden down the hillside from great vats tipped against the indigo sky.

A woman's voice, humming, connects this scene of men and their machines back to the familial reality which makes the drama possible. Cut to an early morning scene of a miner eating breakfast, a woman talking about her life since the strike ended six months earlier, how she tries to get out some evenings to see other women. Another, younger woman tells one of the most important stories of the film. Sitting in a rocking chair, as she did at the beginning of the film when she told how she first became involved in the Wives' group, she now, fourteen months later, talks about how her involvement changed her. "I'm not scared to go out by myself anymore." Before, she was terrified that someone might talk to her and she would have nothing to say. She is the same young woman seen earlier in the film speaking at a mock trial of the Inco Board of Directors, speaking of being a miner's daughter and a miner's wife and a miner's mother. She says she hopes someday she'll be able to hold her head high when she says, "My son is a miner."

Cut from the rocking chair to a picket line for another strike and familiar faces — some of the women in Wives Supporting the Strike have been politicized by that experience, form support groups, and go out to work in their community. Of these, the most militant is the francophone group, who have been shown in the course of the film to be aware of their triply oppressed status as working-class, francophone women. The women form a circle, dancing, and I remember the words of Anne Sylvestre's song, sung earlier in the film by Québec folk star Pauline Julien at a benefit for the strikers — singing of women who have borne and suffered and buried men throughout the ages, she pays tribute to "*un sorcier comme les autres*" (a witch, like all the others).

The heart of the film is the growth of these women, these potential witches, picketers, organizers, mothers, wives, movers, and shakers. They argue, they yell bitterly at each other; an older Scots woman, paying homage to her husband's "thirrrty years of serrrrvice," announces that she will abide by his decision, whatever it is. And what of her own thirty years of service to him? This is my question, but it is raised, in other ways, by other women in the film. One woman says firmly, "My husband is the one who works and brings home the paycheck, but I'm the one who balances his bank account." Another woman, who is seen

earlier in the film reporting on her research about the management of Inco (the Board of Directors, she announces, is composed entirely of men connected with banks, in their sixties and seventies, who seem to be suffering from "hardening of the heart as well as hardening of the arteries"), says now that she is "hot for the strike, I'm for my husband ... and if my husband decides to go back to work, then fuck the strike!" Other women applaud. Cathy, one of the thirty striking women, retorts: "it's not your strike. It's everybody's ... this is history in the making."

A number of recent feminist documentaries have used historical material (photographs, old footage, oral testimony) to pay tribute to women who were active in the labor movement (UNION MAIDS, BABIES AND BANNERS, ROSIE THE RIVETER). A WIVES' TALE also uses this sort of archival material, to very different effect, as it serves to validate the work and experience of women as working-class wives and mothers. It brings their rich and untapped history directly into the present, showing the unbreakable connection between working-class struggle and feminism. When this connection is denied, as it has repeatedly been denied in practice by socialists around the world, the result is betrayal of the struggle — men and women all suffer.

The opening sequence of the film moves from a scene in the mine to an overview of the city of Sudbury, with a woman's voice giving a verbal overview, factual information which is then rooted in personal experiences as she speaks of "our labor" as the source of Inco's profit. Over footage of the strike she brings the film home:

"The strike has now been going on for about six months ... we, as wives of strikers ... our history is a forgotten one."

Credits: A WIVES' TALE. Tracking shot: railway tracks, music, old pictures, old footage, women's voices recounting their history, their arrival in Sudbury, as pioneers, as miners' wives and daughters and mothers, always spoken in the first person, the story of one woman and of many, as paid workers during the war who joined the first union in 1944, who were laid off when the war was over and returned to their customary unpaid work at home, as wives of miners who spoke out against the hardships of the strike of '58 and were then blamed for the poor contract the miners accepted soon after.

Cut now to present-day footage, the Wives of '78, haunted by the shame of twenty years ago, an undeserved shame which recurs throughout the film — if we speak out now and they take a bad contract, we'll be blamed ... but we're speaking out *against* the settlement ... they're afraid we'll turn out to be smarter than them . . . they're afraid of us -. . . they don't trust us ... our own husbands.

Nervous, shy, brassy, tough as old sinew, organizing, collecting money, phoning, speaking, arguing, cooking, washing, cleaning, bright as new pennies, learning new skills, learning the value of skills they already have. Balancing the family bank account means they can balance the group's account very well, thank you — but still the union insists that

checks be signed by a union officer. And the women agree, after an argument. With one dissenting vote. But one of the women who argued against the decision later pipes up and informs her pontificating husband that he is a male chauvinist pig. She explains to the camera that she grew up in a family where father was the boss — she thought it was natural and right. Now she's having other thoughts.

In a written statement accompanying the film's Toronto opening, the filmmakers refer to the Wives' insistence that "we record their 'lows' as well as their 'highs,' their tensions and conflicts — all that would keep them 'real,' even on the big screen, and far away from being 'heroines.'"

"A Québécois film, still and always an act of faith."

"Briefly, A WIVES' TALE, seventy-three colored minutes where the sound and image belong to women."

"It is a different cinema ... why hesitate to name it? It is a militant film, a feminist film, a tale of women."

— the filmmakers

## Notes

[1.](#) Evelyn and Lawrence Cherry were a husband-and-wife team who first made films in England, then came to Ottawa to work with Grierson at the National Film Board, and finally moved to the prairies setting up an independent production company. Evelyn Cherry is still active in filmmaking today.

[2.](#) Since completing HELL NO LONGER in 1970 Lamonthe has gone on to make a series of eight films on the Québec Amerindians, CARCAJOU ET LE PÉRIL BLANC. For a thorough analysis of Quebec filmmaking see Michel Houle's "Themes and ideology in Québec Cinema" in JUMP CUT 22.

(Go to [interview with filmmakers](#))

### *Une Histoire de femmes: A Wives Tale* **Interview with Sudbury Strike filmmakers**

by Peter Steven with  
Barbara Halpern Martineau and Chuck Kleinhans

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 26-29  
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On September 15, 1978, 11,700 mine and smelter workers, local 6500 of the United Steel Workers of America, voted to strike against the International Nickel Company of Canada (Inco.), and for the following eight and one-half months the city of Sudbury, Ontario, was the site of Canada's most important labor struggle since WW2.

Inco was the first major producer of nickel, in the world and remains the largest. It has been operating in Sudbury for over 75 years. Like many other multinationals, Inco has operations in North America and the Third World. Therefore, Inco is in a position where it can now threaten to leave the Sudbury area entirely for its Guatemala and Indonesia operations if its Canadian labor force doesn't buckle to its demands. The company has laid off over 6000 workers in the past 10 years.

The strike ended in June, 1979, with a significant victory for the miners and the entire working class of Canada and Quebec.

At the same time the struggle in Sudbury was significant for many of the women in the city, since they had played a large role in the victory by organizing a militant support group known as the Wives Supporting the Strike Committee. Their efforts shed new light on the role women have historically played in times of labor conflict.

The following interview with filmmakers Sophie Bissonnette, Martin Duckworth and Joyce Rock deals with the role of the women, in that strike and discusses the film being made

about the support group. As the filmmakers stress, the film will be explicitly feminist and told from the women's point of view. The project will be an attempt to participate in a rewriting of a major aspect of working class history.

CHUCK: How did you become involved in making this film? Could you tell us how you've come to the point you're at now?

MARTIN: I went to a Sudbury strike benefit in Ottawa in February 1979, one of dozens across the country. At that time I saw three women speaking from the Wives Supporting the Strike Committee, and it struck me right away that there was an important film to be made. When I asked the three whether they had thought of having a film made about the women's role in the strike, they told me they had already come close to making an application to the Canada Council (a federal agency giving out arts and academic grants) for funding.

Later, hearing I was willing to try to get a film going, the group decided to switch from video, because they have a strong sense they're establishing a tradition that doesn't stop with the strike. They want to make sure that the wives remain autonomous from the union and active in the community after the strike, and for this they feel a film will help. They also want to try to build bridges with other women in similar situations in other parts of the country. Within three weeks after that Ottawa benefit, I contacted Sophie and Joyce — and that's how it got started.

PETER: Why is the Sudbury strike so important?

MARTIN: This strike has had more Canadian working class support than, oh God, since maybe the Ford Windsor strike of 1945. That's because Inco is one of the dozen biggest multinational companies in the country, has one of the most anti-union managements, and is the corporation with the most visibly damaging effect on the environment. It spreads an acid rain all over Northern Ontario's lakes. [\[1\]](#)

It also became a national strike because it was a rank and file strike. The workers voted to strike against the advice of the United Steelworkers hierarchy. The USWA is one of the two biggest industrial unions in control of the Canadian Labour Congress. And the CLC has been losing contact with the rank and file over the last few years, since the leadership has been trying to set up a high level economic planning council with the federal government. Outrage against the steel hierarchy had been building up.

PETER: Tell us about the 1958 strike and the women's role then. The myth about what happened then bears on this latest struggle.

SOPHIE: One of the first things which happened when we got to Sudbury and started contacting the Wives Support Committee was the constant mention of 1958, always in the context of the women's having forced the men back to work. The whole Sudbury community had

maintained the mythology about the women being to blame for the '58 strike's failure.

So when the women started organizing the Support Committee, around the union local they faced a lot of skepticism and a certain hostility from the husbands' suspicions about their intentions. One activity gained them an enormous amount of respect and credibility — a great Christmas party, held before we actually got involved.

JOYCE: They solicited many union locals for donations of toys and collected so many they had to give toys away to non-strikers' kids as well as sending some on to another striking community.

SOPHIE: None of the strikes prior to this had held out past Christmas. It was difficult for families to imagine going through Christmas without a paycheck. When we arrived in Sudbury, there was this mixture of the 1958 myth that the women were to blame, and yet an increasing respect for the Support Committee and their activities.

BARBARA: So, there's another story about '58, right?

SOPHIE: Right. The women started asking themselves about what role women had really played in '58.

JOYCE: In '58 the strike had begun about the same time, had gone from mid-September to just before Christmas. A number of organizationally and politically naive women (about 900) had gone to the mayor of Sudbury, whom history records as totally corrupt, asking him to put pressure on the company to give the men a fair deal and end the strike. But of course he was in cahoots with Inco and other business interests. He eventually suggested a meeting in the city ice arena. There he placed the women in the bleacher seats, himself and other local officials on the ice, and in the audience "plants" of many nonstrikers' wives. Then after he had the plants read proposals, he asked any women who were still opposed to their husbands going back to work to come down onto the ice. It was a totally intimidating environment for the women to express any objections.

When the current Christmas party was being planned, many people were saying, "Ha, ha, this is never going to happen. Who do they think they are kidding? It's going to be a big flop. A handful of women preparing Christmas for 11,700 families? Never" But it was such a mind-boggling success, so rich in spirit, that the men started saying, "Well, I guess we have to give the girls [sic] a pat on the back."

BARBARA: Are you planning on having something in the film about 1958?

JOYCE: The film must include rewriting that history, putting it straight. But it was equally important to be filming while this strike was happening, while the wives were organizing, while they could still say, "How *are* we going to do ... " with no past tense.

BARBARA: What is the platform of the WSS Group? How do they speak about their activities and how do they want the platform presented on film?

SOPHIE: The first leaflet they handed out to invite other women to join their group outlined principles which differ from the way women usually organize around strikes. They appealed that the union was a family affair. They started the leaflet with, "You work for Inco, too. You raise the kids. You reproduce your husband's labor force so he can go back every day and continue to produce for Inco ..." And since Sudbury is basically a one company city, the families are also reproducing the future labor force for Inco.

So it was on that basis that the women organized. Their work centered on providing a lot of moral support for the men. The support group was crucial in building community backing for the strike because in Sudbury the entire city was paralyzed since Inco is the major industry and most other industries sub-contract from them. It's important that people who are laid off as a result of the strike understand who their real enemy is. That was clear in the community because Inco had been laying off for some time. Inco increasingly had a bad reputation even outside Sudbury. It had shut down some Canadian mining locations and had begun investments and operations in Guatemala and Indonesia, which raised hostility towards its exploitive multinational profile. The wives sustained solidarity with their community contracts, for instance, where shopkeepers and banks extended credit to enable the strike to go past Christmas.

Struggling with family tensions was also crucial. In a strike these tensions obviously increase with the number of months out of work. The wives have to cope with the usual workload of the children and housekeeping in addition to having husbands at home who find it hard to deal with suddenly being out of work. Then they have to manage a reduced budget over an extended period of time, which, in this case, for a family of four was \$34 a week. These things create a lot of tensions. So one of their most important contributions was maintaining the family unit and holding the community together — setting up social activities to keep everybody in solidarity.

They've done other things. They set up a crisis center for pregnant women to help them get started with a layette, diapers and milk. They had family pickets. They went outside Sudbury to factory gates and spoke at fundraising benefits. They published a comic book for children to explain the strike. They set up a wives' chorus and organized community suppers to decrease food costs.

JOYCE: They published a strike cookbook, too: how to eat well nutritionally on \$26 or \$30 a week.

Inco had a huge stockpile when the strike started. It was clear to the workers that the company had made them an offer they couldn't accept (a four cent increase, for instance), and Inco went back on gains workers

had made on the previous contract.

The strikers were always faced with the threat of court injunctions. This threat seemed to hold the men back a lot in their sense of what they could do — other than maintain the nominal picket shacks with a few fellows in it. The wives added a spark. They were able to say, "We'll organize, we'll bring other wives and even our children put, we'll send the chorus to sing our repertoire of union and strike songs." They burned the effigy of the personnel manager at the dawn picket tally. The company had sent the workers letters telling them to go back to work, and the workers and wives' eloquent response was a collective letter burning. The wives don't have a vested interest in the standard union thinking, such as, "We mustn't do anything because we have to wait for word from above." The wives constantly felt, "Why not do something? Isn't this a strike?"

SOPHIE: I wouldn't say the union thinking is so standard — it was a rank and file strike and there was lots of militancy from many of the men. The crucial point was that the wives educated themselves politically. In most labor struggles women are kept ignorant about the issues, so that a strike means to them no pay check coming in and a husband out of work, period. The women in Sudbury knew what was at stake and they wanted to participate in that struggle. And they knew that they were fighting for more than just themselves. Of course, there were divisions in the women's group, and not everyone saw the situation as simply as I've discussed it.

JOYCE: Feminists in Canada helped organize many of the strike benefits. Also, the women insisted that we film their conflicts as well as the good moments: the difficulties of organizing, of getting together, of learning about and trusting each other specifically as women that were new to then.

CHUCK: What kind of film are you making and how far along are you?

JOYCE: It's a 90-minute color film, shot in 16mm. There will be two versions, one French, one English. We are working in the tradition of cinema-direct (sometimes referred to as candid-eye in English Canada).

[\[2\]](#)

MARTIN: We want to do another week or two of shooting on the after-effects of the strike on the Wives Group. There was an interesting meeting of the group within three days of the union's acceptance of the company's offer which we filmed. Here an older woman who had been active in the old Steelworkers Women's Auxiliary (defunct since 1975) proposed that they reconstitute the women's auxiliary in the union local. She was massively outvoted. All but three of the others supported the idea that they could be more effective if they had their own autonomous organization. They also realized they had to change their name from Wives Supporting the Strike to something new.

As a group they're now going through a period of redefining what their

role will be. One of the ideas they were discussing during the strike was that they demand the right to attend union meetings as observers, which has never happened up to now. That's one of the ideas they'll be discussing and which we hope to film. And while that's happening, the individual women we have been filming (approximately 10) will be going through an important period of self-discovery and self-examination with their husbands about how to avoid returning to their old roles as housewives, bed makers, and child raisers and how to remain community activists. We hope to film some of those transitions.

SOPHIE: One of the reasons we wanted to stay there so long is they've gone through so many changes in the nine months of the strike, and those changes have continued and hopefully will continue after the strike. The first part of the film will cover the last four months of the strike and probably one month after the settlement. We are also planning a second film which will probably happen one year after the end of the strike to find out what happened to those women — to answer the political question which comes up at the very end of *WITH BABIES AND BANNERS*: "Well, that was very nice, but now back to the kitchen." We are quite hopeful the women won't go back to the kitchen and we want to find out how they'll be able to prevent that, how they'll keep up that struggle. They have to prevent the unions and their husbands from sending them back to the kitchen, which would have the effect of them returning to their pre-militant days, if that becomes the case.

BARBARA: Could you go into more detail about the politics of the film? Martin, I'm really curious to know what's happened to your thinking in the course of working on this film. You've worked on a lot of films, and this seems like a really important breakthrough. You've made other films from a left perspective, but this is the first made from a fully feminist perspective. I wonder how you see those things coming together.

MARTIN: Well, first of all, it's not my film. That's the main thing I've learned finally — how to work with other people, and I'm still learning that hard lesson, to be relearned every day. I think that's the most exciting part — to learn how to be equal partners and workers with fellow militants in the feminist and socialist movements. Because I think if we're going to build movements, it has to be done in this kind of working partnership.

BARBARA: It sounds like a description of the content of the film.

MARTIN: Yes. I think it's a transitional ... you say a breakthrough. I hope it's a transitional breakthrough towards women being able to make their own films about working class/feminist struggles without the need of a man to come in and operate the camera.

JOYCE: We want this film to be widely distributed within both the union movement and the women's movement and to be used there as a departure point for discussion and action. What's been costing a lot of money and time is the fact that the film follows in the tradition of

cinema direct, a tradition of being there and watching and listening and paying attention. That tradition demands more footage, and it's a tradition that agencies like the Canada Council don't respect in terms of the norms of your budget. For them you have to make your budget conform to norms which correspond to a more manipulative documentary tradition. I think that's something that feminist and socialist filmmakers should be much more calculatedly organized around.

PETER: What ideas do the Sudbury women have for the film? How wide an audience are they thinking of, or are they more concerned with it as a specific tool which they could use in Sudbury?

JOYCE: They're very interested in this film being made so that what they have learned in this strike other women can learn from. They had to start from zero and go through the ABC's. Hopefully other women can use the film and not have to start, from scratch. The women filmed hope that other people can get clued in even faster in how to organize against a multinational, not just during a strike but in daily living when you, too, as a wife, work for a multinational.

MARTIN: They don't use terms like working class consciousness or feminist consciousness, but that is what they've evolved during these strikes, not only in Sudbury but in plant-gating and in speaking at benefits for the strike around the whole province of Ontario, which is a huge territory. The wives' chorus has traveled, met women in other parts of the country, and have become aware that they're not isolated.

CHUCK: Why is this strike so different? It is a really inspiring pattern. What conditions do you think led these women to achieve this remarkable unity and determination in pushing forward that they either didn't have before or that women in similar situations haven't been able to manifest?

JOYCE: Necessity. And a general social climate that's theirs in 1979.

SOPHIE: The women's movement!

JOYCE: These women may be 23-ish and sit at home all day or be 50-ish in the same situation, but they live in this company town where every three years a new contract is negotiated. They've had a lot of strikes before '58 and since.

We have been there since the beginning of March 1979, living with strikers' families. Martin, for instance, boards with a woman who is spokesperson for the group and whose husband is a striker. I live with one of the women strikers (out of 11,700 strikers, only 35 are women).

Many women tell you openly how before the strike they sat at home and watched soap operas all day. Now they are just as openly looking around apprehensively with a scared smile on their face thinking, "What will I do now?" because they know they can't go back. Many of them married

very young, in their late teens, and are now in their early twenties with several children to raise.

MARTIN: There were three women who first broached the idea of setting up a support committee, and they belonged to a feminist consciousness raising group established three years earlier, called Women Helping Women, designed to help women meet their own problems. They had produced a very effective booklet for free distribution, giving practical advice on how to get help for their problems. The existence of the earlier group was one reason for such a good response to the call for setting up a support committee. I think that the remarkable unity achieved in Sudbury at this time was due mainly to the tremendous hatred which had built up against Inco and a real profound determination to win this goddamned strike — against the advice of the international union. They were very angry against the company and they still are.

BARBARA: Would it be true to say that a lot of the analysis of the Support Group comes from a reevaluation of traditional women's skills which had never been previously valued?

JOYCE: This film is being made from the women's point of view. I think we're being really thorough in what we shoot, whom we listen to — that it's the women who have center stage. We don't turn to their husbands or the union leaders for approval or confirmation, such as, "Are they doing it right, boys?" The women have more often than not a higher consciousness than the men. Their husbands may have caught up to them, but it's been a catching up process. They had the consciousness, the more highly developed analysis and the militancy to match, much sooner than many of their husbands.

SOPHIE: I think I've had a lot of learning to do from these women. We've had many discussions about the film on a daily basis, deciding what we should film and the meaning or importance of specific events. They're rarely formal discussions like, "OK, now where's this thing going?" It usually happens because we've been living there on a daily basis. The film is on a lot of people's minds (specifically the ten women we focus on), so there's a lot of interaction back and forth.

CHUCK: How are you financing the film? How do three young, broke people make a film? (laughter)

SOPHIE: That's an exciting thing. We've almost been operating in the same way that the strike's been operating in terms of gathering support. We've been doing it on two grounds. On the one hand, we've appealed to individuals and politically or socially involved organizations to give us donations, so that we could shoot on a day-to-day basis. Grants take a long time and we couldn't wait. We've mainly been operating on those individual and socially conscious group appeals that we've sent out. The wives have helped us in that respect, too — one form of their involvement with the film has been giving us a hand with fundraising whenever it didn't interfere with their own fundraising for the strike. We

made sure there was no overlap as to where we were getting the money from.

Our second route has been applications for grant money. We've received \$25,000 from the Canada Council and we applied to L'Institute Quebecois du Cinema which invests in Quebec productions. (Editor's note: \$40,000 received in January 1980.) We should emphasize again that we're making both an English and a French version, because a good 35% of the population in Sudbury is of French origin and are trying hard to resist assimilation in Northern Ontario.

Many people became involved in supporting the film. That's exciting and crucial, especially in Canada and Quebec where activists aren't very familiar with the potential uses of a political film. Film isn't being used very much yet. And scarcity of money and funding sources leads filmmakers into competing for that money which creates a fairly unhealthy climate at times.

BARBARA: What about the issue of communism and redbaiting? Is this an issue in Sudbury and with your film? Is it possible that the women you're filming might be ostracized through redbaiting in the city?

SOPHIE: The Communist Party and Individual CP members have not played a role in this strike. That situation would relate more to the events of 1958. In '58 the sides were described by many as the Roman Catholic Church and the Company versus the Communists. I think the problem now is the way communism is used to blame something on someone and how the women are actually dealing with that. Several women have said to us, on film, "I don't care if I get called a communist. I don't care if I work with radicals. We're in this because we want to move on to get a good deal out of Inco and we want to tell Inco what we think of them."

They don't care if they get called communist or not, but some of the women and some husbands and some union people especially are using that label of communism and putting it on the women. If I may speculate as to what's happening: often the women aren't threatening because they have anything to do with communism, they're threatening because they're stepping out of order, and anything that's stepping out of its ordered role gets labeled communism. More often than not "feminism" would be the more important label. Often what the people who are redbaiting really mean is, you're not acting like a woman, you're not playing a traditional woman's role. What is actually threatening is the fact that the women in the Wives Group are feminists. We've also been redbaited like this, especially when we started the project.

BARBARA: That still leaves the issue untouched. You understand the kinds of fears that lead to that accusation, but you also want to deal with the putdown itself. (Feminists similarly face the put-down "lesbian." The solution does not lie in denying that one is a lesbian.) I was wondering what your politics around dealing with the issue of communism is — both in terms of the union and among the women in the film.

JOYCE: At a certain point in the struggle as strike tensions mounted, redbaiting started from a small number within the Wives Group. That's a part of our film as far as I'm concerned.

MARTIN: They were the same women who voted for the Ladies' Auxiliary.

JOYCE: Yes, three or four in the entire group. Someone first said to us, "This film will never get passed if you put a communist in or if we talk about communism at all." We soon decided that our political integrity or the political integrity of the film depended on our going ahead and including that fact if we had to. If we have to fight for that issue come next spring, then we'll face that then.

Otherwise, it's just feeding into this whole network where you only have to mention the word *communism*, even us, the "big city moviemakers," and we all go scurrying into our corners and go, "Right, we don't mention communism. And please lower your voices and, if possible, put tape over your mouth." That response just keeps redbaiters going no matter what the situation, the city, or the sex of those involved. We hope to talk with those three who have resisted being in the film. They view us very suspiciously and think Martin is a communist because he spends so much time away from his house and family and doesn't believe in God. Now that's interesting, because he's considered a communist, but Sophie and I aren't. He's the man up there and so they count him as "a person away from home" — we don't count anyway. I mean, I'm glad you get the brunt of it, Martin, because it's the shits. (laughter)

Anyway, it's our hope, now that the strike's over, to propose to these women who have resisted being filmed that they tell us on camera what communism means to them and the difficulties they've had with the group — just to put it to them because the issue's been so mystified.

SOPHIE: I think that's particularly important in the context of what this film's all about — about rewriting history from the women's point of view. We have to maintain our integrity. If we're trying to rewrite the women's history of 1958 in order to demystify it, we also have to do the same thing with communism. The women get scapegoated and blamed for the failure of the '58 strike at the same time as communism is also used to justify failures, preventing a lot of union members and some strikers from analyzing what has happened to them. So it's important for the workers also, not only getting rid of all those false ideas but also starting to see, "Well, if I can't blame my wife, if the community's not to blame, then who is?" Then the workers have to start doing the analysis of why the strike of '58 failed.

BARBARA: What's your accountability to them?

SOPHIE: We have an agreement that they have a majority vote. There's a geographic problem in that the editing will be done in Montreal. We'll be organizing a couple of screenings at intermediate stages of the editing

to get feedback from some women and their impressions, then a final meeting to show the finished film.

JOYCE: Of course, when we press ahead and include the mention of communism, I flash forward to that majority vote agreement's determining whether this film gets out or not. It adds a whole subtext to the problematic side of this kind of democratic participatory filmmaking. One of my first reactions to our agreeing to the majority vote was that they could end up making a biased film because of their potential instinct to protect themselves.

Whenever I hear a discussion about accountability and hear filmworkers talking about how they showed people all the stages of the work, I think at the same time there's some hoodwinking there, some skipping over the positive value that your distance, your outsidedness, does bring.

CHUCK: It seems to me that you're being put in that situation whenever you come in because of the skills you have as filmmakers, but you're also coming in as political people who are committed to documenting this struggle and to making a film out of it which will be useful to other people. That puts you in a position of leadership, which you don't want to be irresponsible about. You want to listen to what people are saying, yet you also want to influence them to some extent. You don't want to abrogate your responsibility completely.

JOYCE: If I understand what you're saying, Chuck, it's not possible with these women, and luckily so, because I think we'd feel very awkward. I don't think any of us are suited to being placed in a position of leadership. Also, it's because we did come in five months into the strike. They had already proved their own leadership talents to one another. They're very smart and organized, and they're not bashful in front of a camera. It's not just that they say, "Oh, I think this should be on film to help women in other situations." They're more apt to say, "Oh, you've got a camera. Well, that's nice. What else is new?"

CHUCK: I don't mean you were being leaders in the strike. I was referring to the position you're in, not that you're making the policies of the strike.

JOYCE: I guess the reason why that has not been a problem with the specific ten women we're focusing on is because we did become friends very fast, living in their homes and providing our "shared accountability" on a personal level. We trusted each other to talk issues since we had become friends.

SOPHIE: I think also the fact that we're doing it using cinema-direct sets up an interesting situation. In a sense it's a very manipulative style, but on the other hand it gives us a lot more room to start dealing with those questions. In cinema-direct there seems to be so little intervention on the part of the filmmakers. I think it appeals to audiences depending on their inclination and what they want to see in the film. For example, there's a possibility of making something out of the mention of

communism and how it's used to scapegoat that will click for some people while other people won't respond to it in that way. That's one of the possibilities of using the film in terms of the myths surrounding '58. We can use it just as recording an historical event, but I think several people in the audience who are listening to what happened in '58 will start coloring in how they perceive the strike of 1979. Now, for other people who aren't particularly in tune with some of those distinctions about what communism is all about, what scapegoating entails, and even what feminism is about, perhaps they won't make the link between certain kinds of scapegoating that happened in '58 and things that could happen again.

CHUCK: Here's another side to my question. In some workshops at the Alternative Cinema Conference, people said, "Well, I'm out there to serve the community. I make films." Sometimes it just seems like the medium is being used passively: the filmmaker goes in and simply records other people's views. I don't think that's really accurate.

JOYCE: This whole issue has a lot to do with feminism. It's not just that we went in there like some kind, generous filmmakers from the big city. Part of our creating a rapport has to do with what feminism is stylistically, based on how you approach people and how you don't approach people — whether it's with a camera and sound equipment walking into a room, demanding or recording a situation, or just sitting eating breakfast bleary-eyed with somebody.

SOPHIE: It took us a very long time and a lot of discussions in the women's kitchens before we got some of these things on film, because when you're talking about making a film about women's personal lives and some of the discussions that go on in kitchens, then you have to spend a long time listening before you can actually build a sort of trust and rapport that will bring out those kinds of things that you want in the film. You must get to the point where you feel you're not abusing the women and they feel they're not being abused.

JOYCE: The film focuses on the women, and at the same time the perspective is theirs. They're the ones that are legitimizing themselves — that combined with our feminist politics. They have grassroots, working feminism, but it doesn't get called that, and we have big city, more intellectual feminism. We have more labels, more analysis. They're organizing around this strike. They take these basic skills they learned in the women's auxiliary many years ago or in kitchens or in raising families. The whole, survival network that they know, and they're applying it around the strike. In terms of dealing with us as people, well, you're someone in the kitchen, around the kitchen table, and how you deal with them across the kitchen table is how they decide how much of themselves they're going to give to you and the film.

## **Notes**

1. Acid Rain is airborne sulphur dioxide which has mixed with atmospheric moisture. Such precipitation entering soil diminishes

fertility by leeching out valuable nutrients. Acid rain from Inco's huge stack had been detected as far south as Toronto and Buffalo, New York. For more details and an excellent political analysis of Inco's history and the history of the people who work in the mines and smelters of Sudbury, see *The Big Nickel*, Jamie Swift and the Development Education Centre (Between the Lines Press. Kitchener, Ontario, 1977).

[2.](#) Cinema-direct as used here should not be confused with U.S. direct cinema, the ideology and practice of such filmmakers as Leacock, Pennebaker, Drew, Maysles, Wiseman, etc. Nor should it be confused with so-called true cinema verite as developed by Jean Rouch and Michel Brault in the late 50s. The sync sound documentaries of Quebec and Canada have (characteristically) never been so extreme or dogmatic, rather the films preferred to mix the European and U.S. styles of documentary, sometimes stressing intervention, sometimes interviews and narration, sometimes a detached "candid eye." The term direct cinema, cinema verite, and the forms of cinema direct practiced in Quebec and Canada are not the same. Even though the terms are often now used interchangeably, it remains important to distinguish their procedures and their approaches to events, people, and the intended audience.

(Go to Barbara Halpern Martineau's [review of \*A Wives Tale\*](#))

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### *The Patriot Game* Arthur MacCaig interviewed

by Angela Martin

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Angela Martin conducted the following interview with Arthur MacCaig, director of *THE PATRIOT GAME*, at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1979 and continued it in June in London. Subsequently JUMP CUT asked MacCaig for some clarifications, which he answered in writing. We have included these answers in the interview. None of the questions appear; it's all MacCaig.

MacCaig takes the point of view of the Provisional IRA, which emerged at the beginning of 1970. He focuses on the period 1968-1978. Shots of civil rights marches protesting institutionalized prejudice against Catholics are intermixed with shots of the loyalist (Protestant) police force attacking nationalist (Catholic) districts in Belfast and Derry. Using this and other archival footage from independent sources as well as French and Eirean material, MacCaig examines the escalating violence in Northern Ireland and the military struggle by the Provisionals against the British presence.

MacCaig examines Irish history and shows that the struggle, rather than a religious war as it is often portrayed, is one of Irish nationalism against British economic and political interests. The film includes interviews with hooded Provisionals, a member of the Sinn Fein (the political branch of the IRA), and people in the streets of Catholic ghettos. Footage of "Free Derry" and "Free Belfast," where the social programs of the Provisionals included building parks, day care centers, and meeting places for the elderly, show the popular support they have won.

Angela Martin's discussion of truth and distortion in the media and in political documentaries follows the interview.

## **Arthur MacCaig, interviewed by Angela Martin**

### IDEAS FOR THE FILM

In 1968 I was traveling around Europe and stopped in Southern Ireland for a while. At that point I was just curious to know what was happening. Like most people, I was completely ignorant and it took a long time before I could figure out what was happening. Even for people involved in the struggle itself this was a very confusing time. I dismissed from the start that it was a religious conflict — I had enough sense to realize that it was a political conflict. But most sources of information — let's say the left-wing sources in the USA — accepted the view that the Official IRA was an openly Marxist organization. From this point of view, people got the idea that the Provisionals were some kind of purely nationalist group, nearly fascist-like gangsters.

I shared this view when I visited the North for the first time in 1972. I spent some time in Belfast — in nationalist areas like the Ardoyne — and that just blew my mind. All the ideas I'd previously had were shown to be completely false. This was the first time I had really seen the strength and the power of a mass struggle. Ordinary people directly participated in organizing their communities, organizing the defense of their communities and trying to improve the social welfare of people in those districts.

For over fifty years people had been so demoralized, so oppressed. The previous armed struggles of the IRA had never mobilized the mass of the people. In most of these areas unemployment has been between 25% and 50% for several generations. Well, after fifty years of that people finally began to seize control of their lives and of their communities. And I'd never seen anything like that. The people I met in the Provisional Republican Movement seem like dedicated revolutionaries who are more products of the mass struggle than organizers of it.

### THE HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

Today in Ireland there are one million Protestants to 600,000 Catholics in the six counties of Ulster that make up the Northern Ireland state. In the rest of Ireland there is a population of three million, of which only 5% are Protestant. Although religion has always been an important part of life in both communities, it is a serious mistake to think that people in Ireland are somehow fighting over questions of Christian doctrine. As we try to make clear in the film, the basic division between the "Protestants" and "Catholics" in this conflict is political and economic; that is, the division of colonizer and colonized as in South Africa or Palestine, or in Algeria before liberation.

From the seventeenth century to the present day, Britain has had a policy of encouraging sectarian divisions between the two communities by guaranteeing to the Protestants a stranglehold on political

institutions and on the economic life in Ulster. Unbelievable as it may seem, but a good indication of the nature of British imperialism in Northern Ireland, nationalists only gained the right to vote in local and regional elections in the early 1970s. And for the entire history of this state, laws of exception have been in power, used mainly to intern nationalist suspects.

The highly industrialized northern economy — shipbuilding, heavy engineering, manmade fibers — has been completely dominated by British capital and now to a lesser extent by American and German companies, all of whom have been very careful to favor their relations with the Protestant community. Not surprisingly, Protestants have remained steadfastly loyal to Britain and this includes the loyalist working class, which has managed to unite with nationalist workers only in rare, isolated instances (for example, in certain actions in the 1930s). Their continued alliance with British imperialism can be better understood when one realizes that loyalist workers have always had a monopoly on skilled jobs, enjoying much higher salaries as well as a much higher level of employment than their nationalist counterparts. For example, in 1969 the biggest single employer in Belfast was the Harland and Wolf shipyards, which employed over 10,000 people, of whom only 300 were nationalists. After the riots that August, the nationalists were forced out of their jobs in the shipyards by loyalist workers.

In the early 1920s when the IRA's guerilla campaign was making British rule untenable, the British government was able to save the situation, thanks in large part to support from its loyalist allies in the North, by imposing a compromise treaty with the rebel forces that resulted in the creation of an Irish Free State in twenty-six counties while Britain remained in complete control of six counties in northeast Ulster, in which there was a 2 to 1 loyalist majority. This compromise, apart from provoking a civil war among nationalists in which the revolutionary forces in the IRA were crushed, succeeded in leaving British imperialism with a permanent base for the domination not only of the North but of all Ireland.

And I think that it is here that you can find the answer to the question that so many people ask about this war, which seems to them so senseless and inexplicable — namely, why don't the British just leave? Why do they persist in a conflict which has cost them thousands of millions of pounds (1 pound = \$2.25), not to mention the deaths of over 2,000 civilians and hundreds of soldiers and police? The official answer is the "Big Lie" and the bigger the better. It goes something like this: "The British Army is in Northern Ireland to maintain the peace between the two communities and to bring to justice the criminal IRA terrorists (who are somehow always on their last legs, according to the official version)."

This official line depends a lot on the bloodbath theory, which envisages, after a British withdrawal, loyalists and nationalists massacring each

other in an orgy of Irish irrationality. But, and I hope this is shown clearly in the film, the bloodbath is now and has been going on for ten years, precisely because of the British presence. The nationalists, the people who would be the most vulnerable in such a civil war, have no problem seeing through the bloodbath myth. They and their principal organization, the Provisional IRA, are fighting a war to force the British out because they realize that British withdrawal is the absolute precondition not only for the reunification of the country but also for any possible reconciliation with the loyalist community. So long as the British remain, the loyalists are dependent, manipulated, unable to relate to nationalists except by launching sporadic sectarian assassinations under the protective umbrella of the British Army. The equation is simple enough: the British repress the Irish nationalists, guarantee the privileges of the loyalist community as a whole, and the loyalists in return give their complete backing to the state, to British imperialism.

If successive British governments have been willing to pay a high price in this war, it is because the stakes are even higher. The Northern Ireland state is the mechanism through which all of Ireland is dominated. It divides the nation as it divides the working class, facilitating the political control and economic exploitation in the North but also in the twenty-six counties where British investment is even more important. To sweep away the border, as the Provisionals aim to do, would jeopardize the stability of Ireland and its subservience to Britain. If some leftists in Britain and the U.S. have been confused by the situation in Ireland, those who rule Britain have a clear enough vision of the stakes of this war. Their fears are genuine when they talk of a "Cuba" or an "Angola" being established off their coast.

In the film, it is in this light that we try to show the events in Ireland since 1968. In August 1969, when the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the loyalist police force, backed by mobs of civilians, attacked nationalist districts, it was simply the traditional way of defending their privileges, which in this instance they felt to be threatened by the civil rights movement. Similar riots or pogroms occurred often in the past. The difference was that in 1969, for the first time, there were TV crews in Ulster to record the events. Also, this time the nationalists were not only outnumbered but virtually unarmed as the IRA was practically a dead organization. In the nationalist districts of Belfast nine were killed, hundreds of houses were burnt to the ground, and thousands of refugees fled to the South. But in Derry, after a three-day battle in which the nationalists fought with stones and firebombs, the Royal Ulster Constabulary was driven away and the Bogside, the nationalists' district, became a liberated area.

Spectacular images of rioting and street fighting were broadcast throughout the world — it was a nice change from Vietnam — and Britain was suddenly faced not only with a major political crisis but a serious public relations problem. If Britain has yet to find a solution to the political crisis in Ulster, they have been more successful on the PR

side, by passing off to the media the convenient view of some kind of bizarre religious war in which British soldiers were just "decent lads doing a difficult and thankless peace-keeping mission." And if there was any explanation of the conflict, it was to be found in a basic defect in the Irish character.

In THE PATRIOT game we try to smash these myths and to show what is, in reality, happening in Ireland, to show what is certainly the most extensive, determined working-class struggle in Europe. And apart from the Basques and their organization ETA, it is the only struggle in which the entire population, armed and mobilized, has successfully faced up to the most sophisticated and brutal counterinsurgency techniques ever experimented with in an industrial, urban society.

## PREPARING THE FILM

The actual preparation of the film was done with my own money — and mostly borrowed money. That involved a six- to nine-month period of going back and forth between Paris and Northern Ireland, mostly getting to know the people in the nationalist areas and, more specifically, getting to know people in the Republican movement. At first, because I was a complete outsider, it was a bit difficult — for obvious reasons they have to be very security conscious. So, in the beginning, it involved a lot of hanging around, in a sense losing time. But I think in a general sense, you have to go through that preparation for almost any documentary film — especially when you want to work closely with people involved in a struggle. But once I was accepted by people in the Republican movement, doors were opened for me all over the north of Ireland and I got the fullest cooperation from them.

It was very difficult in the beginning to figure out how to organize the film and how to structure it because I didn't have a real pre-established script — except that I wanted to do an historical analysis. So first of all it involved spending a lot of time in Belfast and Derry and some of the country areas, trying to get to know as much as I possibly could about the Republican movement and different aspects of it. And that was mainly to show the kind of changes people had gone through over the ten-year period, beginning 1968-1969. Second, I had a lot of research to do, tracking down different film documents that had been shot over that period.

## TELEVISION MATERIAL

The advantage with a subject like Northern Ireland is that almost every major television company in the world has shot stuff on it. And there's just miles and miles of footage. I was able to get access to some of it — I had to limit myself simply because I didn't have enough money to travel all over Europe and the U.S. to hunt it down. So to do a film like this means depending a lot on different television companies that have been on the spot for several years, filming major events and filming them from their point of view, and then trying to use their film. Now in economic terms and in terms of time spent, this can be really frustrating

because most television stations are enormous bureaucracies. They don't care about what you're doing and they're very expensive.

So it's very expensive just to research the material; it's even more expensive to actually use it, to buy the rights. In fact, it's just plain murder. Generally they had basic rates, and it's always possible to make a special deal, to get a break in one way or another, but in the end you wind up paying an awful lot for each minute of that material that you use. The BBC, I think, charges something like \$8 a foot (there are forty feet in a minute of 16mm film). Virtually one-third of THE PATRIOT GAME is made up of this documentary footage. Altogether it cost a little over \$10,000. The rest of the film is material we shot or photographs donated by friends.

We were very fortunate in getting a lot of the stuff from Radio Telefis Eirean (RTE), the state television of the Irish Free State, which is one of the least bureaucratic television stations I've encountered. They helped us a lot. They had terrific stuff because they have a crew up there nearly all the time. I haven't been in Europe long enough to know what has been broadcast, but the stations have footage of it all, that's for sure. I remember seeing some stuff that the BBC had shot of Bloody Friday. They managed to have a crew on the scene of some of the bombings almost immediately after they occurred. And what they filmed was the police and soldiers shoveling bodies into plastic bags. I was told that that was transmitted all over Britain.

And then I remember an interview with a loyalist extremist who said it was on seeing that footage that he decided it was necessary for him to become directly involved in the loyalist struggle against republicanism — which consists mainly of going around placing bombs, not giving warnings, and randomly assassinating nationalists. That's the kind of use news footage has been put to. It's obvious that the influence the media and the news have on people is just tremendous. And that's what this kind of film and other progressive or left documentaries or fiction films are fighting against.

We show some examples of media distortion, such as Bloody Friday, the ad for the prison service, and the ones about informing which give secret police numbers, etc. But it's not a film on media distortion, though I think people will be very aware, on seeing the film, that there has been distortion. For me, television is really frightening to the extent that it puts to sleep millions and millions of people and contributes to their alienation.

Our idea was to give as much information as possible — not too much but as much as is possible for people to handle in an hour and a half: like the necessary historical information. What I'd really like to say about the film is I think it's objective in a real sense of the word, and I think it gets to the root of the problem there. And it touches on the truth more than, let's say, the classic television documentary that will interview a loyalist, then interview a nationalist — except they'd say they'd be interviewing a Protestant and then a Catholic. For me, the objective truth is the

historical truth of the situation based on the experience of the mass struggle.

## SHOOTING AND EDITING

Going to Ireland, telling people I wanted to make the film, and doing the preparation began in August 1976 and involved about four trips. The actual shooting began in June 1977 and we had our first print by the end of March 1979. For a normal documentary film — a Frederick Wiseman film, for example — to end up being an hour and a half, he's liable to shoot over a hundred hours of film. And he's not even in super-production; he has the production capacity he needs to make his kind of film.

For our film, we were under an awful lot of pressure to be very, very careful in what and when we filmed. We shot four hours over a three-week period: that is, an interview with a couple of people (in the Republican movement, an interview with a woman in the Relatives Action Committee, stuff like that, and the taxi and pub sequences. The taxi sequence is about the People's Taxis, those black taxis that you see everywhere in West Belfast and in other nationalist areas. In October 1969, following the riots in loyalist districts in Belfast, the city government took the public buses off the road. Within days they were running again for the loyalists, but it was several months before the nationalists had their bus service restored.

In the meantime, however, the nationalists had gone over to England to buy used taxis and to put into operation a collectively run transport system that over the years has succeeded in creating several hundred jobs as well as providing an important service to the people. The People's Taxis are really something to see. They run twenty-four hours a day, they are cheap, and they are certainly the most sociable form of public transport that I've ever seen.

The success of the black taxis is a good example of the contradiction that British imperialism is constantly being caught up in during this war. Every time they have upped the repression against the nationalists, they have succeeded only in further radicalizing them, making them more self-reliant, more confident in their own ability to organize themselves, and, of course, more hostile to any established authority. In this case, the city bus corporation just about blew it forever. The nationalists no longer need the buses except occasionally to reinforce a barricade, and the People's Taxis are there to stay despite constant harassment from the British Army.

The pub sequence I like a lot because it gives a good insight into the pervasive nature of the nationalist resistance and the role that music plays in the struggle, as well as showing the spirit and sense of humor of the Irish. We filmed this sequence in a Republican social club in Andersontown, a district in West Belfast. The British Army sends patrols through these clubs virtually every night so we knew they were coming, in fact we knew exactly when they were coming. The result was

that we were ready for them and they certainly weren't ready for us. As they entered the pub, the group The Freeman, who were playing that night, launched into a medley of songs mocking the British Army. This is something that happens whenever a British patrol comes into a Republican pub. Such a scene can be comical, but it can also be violent, as it is not uncommon for fights to break out with the soldiers, who have a way of knocking bottles off tables with their unwieldy rifles. In this case, because of the presence of a camera crew, the patrol was all smiles, very polite, and there was no confrontation.

Afterwards, however, the neighborhood around the club was blocked off and all the cars leaving were searched by the British; apparently they were looking for us. And about one month later, the manager of this club, Jack McCartan, was killed by soldiers from the same regiment that you see in the film. One night as he was closing up, they just put a bullet through his head, for no apparent reason, except of course that he was a nationalist, a Provisional supporter, which, today in Northern Ireland, is reason enough for the British Army to kill someone.

Obviously I would have liked to have had more film when we were shooting, but in a sense it was good because we were very disciplined. I prepared the interviews very well so that in some sense it was positive. But the limitation in the film — where I think it's weak — is that we don't get into the daily life of people there the way I would have liked to because that really involves shooting a lot of film. For example, it would have been good to get into a single district — like the new Lodge Road — and show exactly how people organized themselves there.

The New Lodge area is a nationalist enclave in north Belfast, entirely surrounded by loyalist districts. It has a population of approximately 6,000 living in rows of tiny brick houses built in the nineteenth century and in modern high-rise flats. On top of the flats are British Army observation posts. Foot patrols and armored personnel carriers constantly move through the district; frequently there is a helicopter hovering above. Despite all this attention given to the New Lodge, it has been hard hit by "sectarian assassinations" — those random attacks on anything or anybody nationalist. When I was there in August 1976 a young couple and their baby were killed in a firebomb attack on their home. Altogether over fifty people have been killed in similar attacks during the present conflict. Because these attacks have occurred with such ease, many local people are convinced that the SAS, a special army unit that operates in civilian clothes often is responsible for the murders. If and when loyalist extremists are involved, it is obvious that they can only act with the complicity of the British Army.

It is in this context that people organize themselves in the New Lodge and in other nationalist areas. The strength of the nationalists is in that the job is not left just to professional militants. Everyone in the community has a place in the struggle, whether it's the kids who are forever throwing rocks at the foot patrols or the families who refuse to pay their rents and rates. In the New Lodge, every block, every

apartment building has its own action committee, in which anyone who wants to can participate. These committees deal with specific local problems such as family disputes, delinquency, organizing day care facilities, playgrounds, etc.

Each committee stays in close contact with the area's Sinn Fein office, reporting suspicious individuals or cars seen in the area and any incidents involving the British Army, as well as organizing demonstrations such as those in support of the political prisoners. And in the event of a major crisis, People's Assemblies, involving the whole district, are called. It is evident that organizations such as the IRA, Sinn Fein, and the Relatives Action Committee (the principal prisoner support group) play an important leadership role, but the force of the nationalist resistance is to be found in its mass nature and in the remarkable spirit of solidarity that exists in the nationalist community.

Because we had such limited financial means, we didn't consider trying to film in loyalist districts or trying to talk to loyalist leaders and ordinary loyalist people. In the film we essentially relied on stock footage of the main popular loyalist politicians like Harry West and Ian Paisley, who remain popular despite all the confusions and crises the loyalist population has gone through in the last ten years. They express best where loyalists are at, and the film tries to explain why such points of view remain popular. Another thing was that we spent a lot of time in nationalist areas, and to go into loyalist areas afterwards would have been very difficult. By that time the British Army knew pretty much what we were up to.

One of our biggest problems was how to deal with the army and how they were going to deal with us. Two things happened. We were very careful in preparing certain interviews, which we tried to do in the first couple of days.

Secondly, we were lucky. If you go out into the streets of a place like Belfast and start filming, you're immediately stopped by the British Army because they're everywhere — on every high building in the city. You can't move a foot without their spotting you. But the other two people with me were French, so whenever we were stopped, they did all the talking, in order to give every impression that we were a French TV crew. However, toward the end of the shooting, we'd spent too much time in nationalist areas — most TV crews come in, make a few phone calls, interview a couple of people, and are out again in a couple of days — so the army arrested the people with me (fortunately I wasn't there at the time) to ask a few questions. At that point we'd got what we wanted so it didn't matter very much. Nevertheless, for outsiders who aren't used to it, being lifted by the army, by people with guns, is frightening.

In Ireland, I was the cameraman, but I also had a very experienced cameraman with me who filmed a lot of the interviews — Theo Robichet, one of the best cameramen in France. I was really lucky to have him on the project because in this kind of situation a technical screw-up can be a catastrophe, so the technical problems we had in Ireland were very

quickly resolved. Plus I had a very good sound engineer — Olivier Schwob. We were students together at l'IDHEC and, although his experience was limited, he's a really good technician.

I was very lucky in having an experienced editor, Jacqueline Mepiel, who helped me organize the editing in the beginning. Without that I would probably have been completely lost. From there I got the film down to a basic structure, but when I got completely bogged down, Dominique Greussay arrived on the project and helped me finish it over a three-month period — that is, finish the editing, polish it off, and, especially, do the sound editing.

None of the technicians were paid at the time. If they hadn't advanced their services, the film would never have been made. I mean when you look at the kind of unemployment there is in the film industry and you ask someone to work for nothing, it's murder. And even though it's a political film and there's a political commitment involved with those people, which is the reason they did it, they should be paid just the sane.

## POSTPRODUCTION COSTS

It's a black-and-white film, so just the film and lab costs up to the first print came to around \$10,000. That's the cost of film, development, printing, editing the negative, and an optical sound track — and I'm not talking about mixing the film or anything, just strictly lab costs. And that too could have been much more expensive. We were able to get film a bit cheaper, all those kinds of things which you shouldn't do but which you have to do when you don't have the kind of budget you really need. After meeting the initial lab cost, we were able to get a certain amount of credit — that was the single most critical debt.

Another thing that was very costly was that we had to mix the film twice for the English and French versions, and in France that's something like \$100 an hour. The premixing of the film plus the mixing of the two sound tracks took five days. But we got a break. The people who mixed the film in Paris spoke for us and the cost was cut by 50%. Once the lab work is done and you've got your sound processed optically, the actual cost per print is fairly low, especially if it's a black-and-white film — just over \$400 for an-hour-and-a-half film.

We made the film without a lot of money up front. I was always borrowing money, and once ISKRA (the French distribution company) finally supported the project, they were able to inject some money into the film when it was absolutely necessary, to buy sound tape and do the mixing. For a long time, though, we were never even sure the film was going to make it.

Up to now we've made strictly noncommercial sales — we hope to make some TV sales. The Other Cinema is handling the film in England as is the United Troops Out Movement. The Provisional Sinn Fein in Ireland has bought a print. We've also made a noncommercial sale in France.

(Since he gave this interview, MacCaig reports that, in terms of distribution, TV sales, prizes, etc., the film has done quite well, gaining especially wide distribution in Europe. "It should also be noted, he writes, "that we were able to recoup the film's costs, pay the technicians and cover outstanding debts within the first year of distribution." Also the British government has shown a great interest in the film's career, especially its TV sales. "While it is difficult to prove, we nonetheless have good reason to believe that the British government has applied pressure on European TV stations not to broadcast this film.")

## THE FILM'S AUDIENCE

The film has now been shown very widely in both Irelands. They're really happy with the film — they think it's the best thing they've seen. But at the same time they can see weaknesses in the film and they have criticisms I agree with. For example, the treatment of the Peace Movement is a bit weak — what we need is a whole film on that movement, it's such a ridiculous media event. You can't find a better example of how the media can distort a situation, and we just give it a very quick treatment in the film.

The film's also weak in getting into the real extent and methods of repression by the British Army in the North. We've got some good footage of that kind of repression in action — but again an entire film is needed. What the British Army is doing in the North is a model; they are the most advanced in terms of counterinsurgency. And what they're doing and what they're learning in Ulster could very well be used, say, on the British mainland. They're certainly in touch with the other armies in, say, NATO and the U.S., and what they're learning there is going to be used elsewhere. It would have been nice to go much more deeply into that. These criticisms came from Republicans and a nationalist audience in the North who know most of this. But it's an important criticism in terms of people outside of Ireland.

As far as the film's opening in London is concerned, I didn't know what to expect from a British audience. But it was very satisfying for me — there was a lot of good press, and such pro-Republicanism is apparently quite scandalous.

One of the best criticisms put forward by that audience was that the film didn't tackle the so-called bloodbath theory, which is a basic element in British propaganda to justify the existence of British troops. I was aware of this when I was making the film, but, perhaps because I haven't been living in Britain. I didn't really appreciate its importance as a propaganda weapon. Really the best answer I can give to that is that the bloodbath is right now, that it's been going on for ten years, and the root cause of the bloodbath is British imperialism.

(Go to Angela Martin's  
["The Patriot Game: truth and distortion"](#) )

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### *The Patriot Game* Truth and distortion

by Angela Martin

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What follows are some thoughts provoked by our response in England to the situation in Northern Ireland, by *THE PATRIOT GAME*, and by various discussions with its director, Arthur MacCaig. A film like this — indeed any film on Northern Ireland — raises a number of important questions which cannot, for various reasons, be covered in an interview. It's not my intention here to "have the last word." I simply wish to suggest some questions which one shouldn't necessarily expect a film's director to answer but questions which require further work and which might also provide some useful starting points in discussion of this film.

#### LEFT CIRCULATION OF FILMS

One area of consideration is the economics of film production and distribution within the left. An extract from the interview appeared in a British left paper, *Socialist Challenge* (21 June 1979), to coincide with the London opening. Knowing the enormous cost of making the film and also the knock-on costs to the distributor of a film like this and thence to the renter, it seemed important to signal that situation in the left press. The proceeds from the screening — organized jointly by The Other Cinema and the United Troops Out Movement, both distributing copies of the film — were to go toward the production costs.

So, alongside the interview with Arthur MacCaig, there was to have been an interview with The Other Cinema about the cost of making prints, running a London opening, publicity, etc. But this second interview was cut and replaced by a very large still from the film. Once again the economics of left film production were to be ignored.

There has been an increasing number of *feature-length* documentary/agit films (*HARLAN COUNTY*, *ON COMPANY BUSINESS*, *THE WAR AT HOME*, *DIRT CHEAP* — the Australian film about uranium mining on Aborigine land). Any left group wanting to show them is almost forced to think in terms of a film-show with tickets,

rather than simply inserting a film into a meeting as an element in the discussion. This is not only in relation to the cost of a film and hence by implication to the limited financial basis of much political work but also in relation to length. Many of these films last longer than a meeting reasonably should. A number of points should be made here: actually there is nothing wrong with a film-show in this context, and I would argue that pleasure, entertainment, and humor in political work is an excellent thing. However, for many groups, films are an extra expense, which may not succeed in getting people to march and lick envelopes or ensure that important issues are discussed at union meetings after a long day. It is certainly very difficult to persuade trade union headquarters or pressure groups that a film costing anything between \$10,000 and \$100,000 is something they should be financing. On the other hand, of course, film workers are concerned that film — indeed, all cultural production — should be considered to have importance for the left and to be seen as a crucial element of struggle.

### WHOSE TRUTH?

Discussion of content apart, a film like THE PATRIOT GAME raises questions of truth, distortion, the redress of balance, propaganda, etc., and is similar to the frequent discussion — though in reverse — around the news media representation of Northern Ireland. Two pamphlets [\[1\]](#) had recently been published, both crucially discussing the incidence and the nature of misrepresentation and censorship in the media. The IRA is not recognized in the arena of political discussion on television:

"Over the years, the BBC has evolved what might be called a 'public order' broadcasting policy on Northern Ireland. This consists of [the following] important elements. First, there is general support for the British Army and the RUC and their role in law-enforcement in the Province. Second, there is a negative evaluation of extremism and terrorism, and of the IRA in particular, which is presented as the principal enemy..."[\[2\]](#)

Within this context, one also has to consider the professional practice of media (particularly news) workers:

"Dominant notions of the 'newsworthy' define certain occurrences — violent events, for example — as worthy of notice and others — political debate — as deserving less attention. Thus much news reporting on Ireland consists solely of the recounting of shootings, bombings, arson, weapons searches and the like ... Patterns of repetition set up their own conclusion; by the simple accumulation of journalistic example. Irish politics becomes implicitly identified with meaningless violence."[\[3\]](#)

MacCaig is very clear that he wanted THE PATRIOT GAME to show historically the mass struggle of the people of Northern Ireland through the Republican movement. In a way, his film's point of view on the

question of truth is settled at the beginning of the film, when the camera pulls back from a TV screen in a Republican club, out through the door and into the street. But the battle around truth is very complex.

## WHO'S LISTENING?

Now, there is no dispute — or ought not to be any — that the media support (British) state interests in their approach to Northern Ireland. The established media's denial of their being a conventional war situation and of the Republican Army as a legitimate enemy in that context forces the Republican movement to find an outlet for its voice elsewhere. The question then arises: to whom should this oppositional voice be addressed and, therefore, how?

There are several reasons for posing this question: the left has a very negative record on Ireland's liberation — both in the North and the South — and there has been almost no general left support for the Republican movement. The two major demands around which sections of the left in England have organized are for the withdrawal of the troops and for free speech on the situation. But while the first is possibly the only gathering point of a relatively broad left grouping, the second represents — as much, if not actually more — the concerns of media workers in England, rather than the people's case in Northern Ireland.

And the implications would seem to be that, from the English point of view, either there is no mass voice in the North that is being denied a hearing or that there are several conflicting voices which are so contradictory as to make the wholehearted support of any one impossible.

The British state has set the public terms of the struggle as those of *civil disorder* by *terrorists* from a *religious minority*, squabbling with the *loyalist* Protestant majority. But none of the various interest groups is actually employing the same terms — or, rather, is but paints them in a different color so that there appears to be no solution. The British government talks of civil disorder, British authority and responsibility, decent law-abiding citizens. The Republicans talk in terms of a united Ireland (since nationalism is historically the only framework of opposition). The loyalists talk in terms of being British, which assures their continuing dominance. The British media talk in the reductionist terms of balance and numbers — like scorekeepers of a game (similar to the one played around race and immigration). And the left in England talks about class disunity, half-heartedly supports the idea of self-determination but is prone to the bloodbath theory (i.e., that if the troops were pulled out civil war would ensue), is cautious about nationalism, and above all — albeit correctly — demands freer access to information.

Consequently many people on the left in England feel that THE PATRIOT GAME does not touch these issues and contradictions. It is, of course, unreasonable to ask of one film that it take every aspect of a situation on board, and certainly any inadequacy in the film must be

seen in terms of the chaos of the information game in which it is just one of the players. But it also has to be said that unless contradictions are taken account of by a film they will continue to question the position that film supports, even after it has been screened.

This is not the first film on Northern Ireland from the left. Cinema Action made PEOPLE OF IRELAND under extremely prohibitive conditions and at a time when, one of the group has pointed out, the left in England simply would not have believed that the right to film anywhere in Britain would be denied. The Cinema Action member went on to say that when it was finished, the intellectual left in England was unable to understand what was happening in the film whereas most of the workers who saw it understood immediately that the situation was indeed one of class struggle.

It is certainly important to ask why there appears to be no widespread middle-class liberal and intellectual support in England for the Republican movement as there has been for other liberation struggles. Who and where are the intellectual left's heroes in this movement? It isn't just that the era of heroes has passed: there haven't been any in the Irish situation since James Connolly. The Irish people certainly have their heroes — and heroines — but there is very little writing for the intellectual left to get its teeth into. At the same time we don't actively search out the music — the main cultural expression of the people — and we don't subscribe *en masse* to *Republican News*. We too accept — or fall into — the terms set by the British government and the(ir) media.

Somehow, it seems, being either romantically or theoretically involved in the situation is not possible for the English left as it was, perhaps, in relation to Vietnam. At the same time, the close-to-home aspect that that war took on for middle-class American families, which enhanced and enlarged the antiwar movement, does not exist here. The British Army does not conscript from across the board but recruits from amongst young, bored, and unemployed working-class men. Hence the visible expression of the soldiers' disenchantment has been small: UTOM prints testimonies in its paper and there is just one film about ex-soldiers — HOME SOLDIER HOME. In addition, the extremely important and active campaigning of people like Pat Arrowsmith in England is met with consistent and often violent harassment by the state and disinterest from the left.

## WHICH VOICE?

In April 1980, the National Film Theatre in London screened a very successful retrospective of films by Santiago Alvarez. In this program there was a number of films about Vietnam, showing the mass struggle of the people in the North, their determination to win and the beginning of socialist unity. Almost immediately after the event there happened to be a TV program about the "boat people" and their new life in Britain. The program began with footage of South Vietnam right after the war had ended. The images chosen were alienating and the impeccable and authoritative English voice talked about the terror of people faced with

"these communist tanks coming towards them down the road" so that they had no choice but to flee.

In other words, for this film, there was certainly no item on the agenda about building a united country. And because this was so different from what we'd been watching at the NFT, the shock of the difference and the realization of those "patterns of repetition" and "simple accumulation" mentioned earlier was enormous. Our general viewing situation vis-à-vis Northern Ireland is just such an accumulation of negative images with very little radical break like the totally unintended juxtaposition I've described here of material on Vietnam.

There are two major problems about Northern Ireland then for left cultural workers. (It is not just a question of there being lies and deliberately constructed absences to be corrected, both of which THE PATRIOT GAME makes a crucial contribution towards rectifying.)

One major problem is the terms in which we understand the situation, particularly in England and on the Left, so that the voice of the people of Northern Ireland does not continue to fall on deaf ears. For example, we need to understand why the troops are still there. We need to understand precisely the structure of neocolonialism affecting Eire and its relationship with the North — and the shifts in that structure. We need to understand the importance of religion in practice. We need to sort out the question of class/ nationalism in relation to this specific situation. We need to interrogate the cultural myths and stereotypes operating amongst Catholics and Protestants about each other and amongst us in England about them both. We need to understand much more coherently the ideological workings of the bloodbath theory. We need to *deconstruct* these myths and stereotypes visually and *visually construct* alternatives.

Alongside this is the other major problem of the accumulation in the media of visual representations, the images which stand for that dominant view of the situation: for example, soldiers working under difficult conditions; before and after bombings; politicians and army personnel talking in tones of "reason" about violent minorities and decent citizens.

Therefore, we need to interrogate the media's own terms of reference so that their point of view is called into question each time it is presented to us as it is by those people directly involved in the struggle. For example, on very few occasions when we have seen a bomb go off on the news, is it made clear that we can only see it because sufficient warning had been given for a camera crew to reach the scene and, of course, for casualties to be prevented. But because the news is expected to be immediate, it is easy to think camera crews appear almost by magic. Such factors have important implications, I think, for the kind of filmmaking THE PATRIOT GAME belongs to, not just in terms of the presentation of the media's images, but also in terms of the film's own meaning construction. Perhaps this can be made clearer by looking at some concrete examples from other films.

The very impressive French Canadian film, *LA DANSE AVEC L'AVEUGLE*, which lasts seventy-five minutes, is about the situation in Guinee under Sekou-Toure, whom the film implicates unquestionably in an indictment of state repression and violence against the people. But the film uses footage of the president shot at close quarters and with apparent free access, which could not possibly have been the case if the filmmakers had indicated the intention of their film or shot the material themselves. However, the source of these images is not indicated and the viewer is left wondering why Sekou-Toure allowed himself to be filmed or who these filmmakers are, or just confused.

*LAST GRAVE IN DIMBAZA* was uncredited for several years because it had been shot clandestinely. Yet several more recent films about South Africa talk about extreme repression and censorship and yet do not seem to have been subject to this themselves. In this respect some of them — like one of the least useful politically, *THE DISPOSSESSED* — virtually support (despite what they're about) the South African government's claims that greater freedom exists.

An excellent new U.S. film, *THE WAR AT HOME*, leaves the viewer unclear about Karl Armstrong (in many ways the most important person in the film) because the interview with him is shot like all the others and looks as if it was perhaps conducted in the same house his father is speaking in. It is clear — from their very careful editing — that they wanted to build up to his sentence for the bombing, but when we do find that out, they could have made Armstrong's situation easier to read without jeopardizing him or themselves.

*THE PATRIOT GAME* uses footage which MacCaig bought from TV stations and which he would not have been able to shoot himself even if he'd been there at the time because the Brits get very jumpy around cameras, and even an 8mm one is likely to bring half a dozen soldiers brandishing rifles. Yet the film does not make clear the different statuses of the images.

In other words, we don't seem to take into account the importance of the material conditions of specific footage to the overall image a film wants to create nor, indeed, the ability of the state to recuperate even its own images and its own mistakes. Last year's broadcast in the TV Current affairs series *WORLD IN ACTION* looked at the background of the Maze prisoners' hunger strike. Not only was Bloody Sunday there and apparently admitted to be an error on the army's part, but the director had also secured an interview with one of the hunger strikers, Raymond McCartney, for one question and a rather lengthy reply. Loyalist MP James Molyneux took the matter up with Margaret Thatcher, who replied in the House of Commons two days later: "It was thought that the government has absolutely nothing to hide about the Maze Prison or about its hunger strike. There can be no such thing as a political prisoner. It was thought this was one possible way of counteracting the IRA propaganda." Now both the BBC and the ITV have made serialized histories of "The Troubles" which are very likely to make understanding

the situation more rather than less difficult.

Filling in the gaps and correcting the lies is important, but we — and especially the misinformed English in this respect — cannot keep up, unless we are very conscious, with the continuous outpourings: the repetition, accumulation, and reformulations of the same basic lies. We can only really counteract them when we understand not only the basic lies but also the specific nature of their constant reformulations.

#### POSTSCRIPT JULY 1981

Since Art and I agreed on the final version of this material for JUMP CUT, the situation in Northern Ireland has changed considerably and so have attitudes. The British Government went back on its word at Christmas 1980 about prisoners' demands, and Bobby Sands began his hunger strike. During its course, 30,000 people who could not be so easily dismissed as a violent minority elected him to the British Parliament. Some 150,000 people attended his funeral.

The British media was, it would seem, completely surprised. Too important an event to ignore and impossible to be reductive about, considerable space was given to its representation by the news services of other countries (including the USA). The difference in approach was extraordinary and could not fail to impress the reader or viewer. It was at that point particularly clear that the rest of the world saw the situation from a completely different point of view.

Other IRA prisoners have followed Sands' hunger strike and had huge success in the Eirean elections. Thatcher began to make public her discussions with the Eire government (first Haughey, now Fitzgerald) about the possibility of dual responsibility for the North. But still playing for time with the hunger strikers, she has sent in an Irish Commission for Justice and Peace — and more recently the Red Cross — to negotiate terms with them. However, she can no longer convince everyone into believing that she means well. She has begun to lose the media battle she thought she would so easily win.

A further miscalculation on the part of the British was the unbelievably stupid attempt to snatch IRA men with guns in the middle of Joe McDonnell's funeral as they followed the hitherto unimpeded ceremony of firing over his coffin, presumably intended to be an Iranian Embassy siege-style media coup.

In addition, we have begun to see in England, as MacCaig and others have predicted, the use of tactics against rioters that have been developed in Northern Ireland. Recently the police used CS gas (first used in Ulster in 1965) in the street fighting with the working class kids in England's own ghettos, the English police have also been equipped with "plastic bullets" (an extremely hard projectile/club, five inches long and two inches around, fired at very high velocity). But so far they haven't been authorized to use them.

Finally, I recently attended a screening in Paris of THE PATRIOT GAME (which still impresses me). Afterwards the very first question was: why is support for the IRA In England so weak? But I don't think this means that the problems I've been discussing only arise in terms of an English audience and are not, therefore, relevant to the film in a more general viewing context. They do exist in a specific way around THE PATRIOT GAME in England, but are, as I hope I have argued, important for any documentary-based film work aimed at political change.

## Notes

1. *The British Media and Ireland*, Campaign for Free Speech in Ireland. May 1979, available from Information on Ireland, 1 North End Road, London W 14; *Media Misreport Northern Ireland*, Belfast Workers Research Unit Bulletin, No. 6, April 1979, available from 52 Broadway, Belfast.

2. Phillip Schlesinger, *Putting Reality Together*, Constable, London, 1978.

#3 Jim Greal, "The Media's War in Ireland," *Screen Education*, No. 31 (Summer 1979).

(Go to Angela Martin's [interview with The Patriot Game's director, Arthur MacCaig](#))

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### *The Terror and the Time* A new Guyanese cinema

by Bert Hogenkamp

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 34-35

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Shortly after the notorious Jonestown massacre in 1978, there was a brief time when the world realized the existence of a country named Guyana. Some journalists even reported on the political situation of the country, albeit very superficially. Today the world seems to have forgotten Guyana even though the political situation has deteriorated dramatically since 1978. *THE TERROR AND THE TIME*, the title the Victor Jara Collective chose for their film on the Guyanese struggle against British imperialism in 1953, is just as appropriate for the situation in Guyana now. *THE TERROR AND THE TIME* is a first step towards a real Guyanese cinema and it deserves further attention. In the following article, I would like to analyze the place of this film within the Guyanese cinema situation.

Before its independence, Guyana's news and entertainment media were effectively controlled by the British colonists and the major landowners. The people who comprised a major portion of the film-going audience had no say in what was shown. In 1947, *Motion Pictures — British Guiana* was published by the Industrial Reference Service, which is an organ of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This report was compiled by the U.S. consulate in Georgetown:

"No motion pictures are produced in British Guiana. Practically all those shown are received from the United States. According to a local ordinance, at least 10% of the films shown in each theater must be British, but under existing conditions, this regulation is not being observed. A few films of British-Indian origin are brought in by Indian agents. These Indian films are not shown in city first-run houses."

"*Film preferences* — In the city theaters, the audience is mostly of African or East Indian descent; about 25% are of European and United States origin. In country theaters, the

patronage is comprised almost entirely of sugar-estate employees and villagers of African or Indian origin, but it includes a few Chinese and, possibly to the extent of 5%, persons of other races. Most of the Negro movie-goers prefer films that include Negro actors and actresses, and those with all-colored cast do exceedingly well in this country. The Indian community patronizes liberally the British all-Indian films."

*"Audience reactions* — Audience reactions to their motion picture entertainment depend very much on the stars in the pictures and the quality of production. Approval or disapproval is expressed freely and affects attendance at subsequent showings of the film. Ordinarily, occupants of the lower priced seats are particularly demonstrative and are so noisy during filming of prolonged love scenes or pugilistic encounters that parts of the picture become inaudible to persons occupying balcony or rear seats. Films that point a moral meet with great approval. Audience control is exercised by the Police Department, and law courts deal harshly with anyone creating a really serious disturbance during a performance. Very few people leave during a show."

*"Suggestions for improving films shown* — Films having a universal appeal are usually more successful than those based on incidents of United States history or dealing with modern life in the United States. For full appreciation, such films should carry enough background material to give some understanding of our economic and social problems, and thus should be selected with care."

The report continues, providing detailed information about film censorship, number and geographic distribution of cinemas, taxes, attendances, showings, prices, film distribution, and advertising media.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of this report is that with a few changes, it holds true today. Although Guyana became independent in 1966 and has since proclaimed itself a socialist country, U.S. film companies continue to control most of the Guyanese cinema market. The Co-operative Republic, as Prime Minister F. Burnham's government is called, exerts strict censorship in film circulation. As a member of the Victor Jara Collective put it: "I'm afraid that socialist -Guyana, for the most part, still feeds on BLACULA and GAAI AUR GORI."

With Guyana's rising unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s, a visit to the cinema is becoming a much more popular pastime, especially in the capital of Georgetown. There is no TV in Guyana. The film diet consists entirely of Hollywood blockbusters, black exploitation movies, and Bombay spectacles. Cuban films are shown occasionally at private screenings. Films from other third world countries cannot be seen at all. Since the cinematic infrastructure in Guyana is completely oriented to 35mm film, a 16mm projector is an extremely rare object. Ironically,

anyone wanting to show a 16m film can get help from the U.S. or from West European embassies.

The need for a Guyanese cinema made for the people, about the people, and by the people exists. Unfortunately, the political and economic situation in Guyana prevents independent filmmakers from producing their own films. They are completely dependent on financial support from the government. After its independence, Guyana opened its own Film Center, which was financed with West European and U.S. money. This Film Center is fully equipped to produce all sorts of films. However, the Ministry for Information and Culture has complete control of the Center. Their jurisdiction has killed the ambitions of many young Guyanese filmmakers and technicians, who may have been inspired by their media training abroad. Currently, the Film Center produces the obligatory news films for and about the ruling Burnham government and some standard industrial documentaries.

The Victor Jara Collective — named for the Chilean singer/composer who was murdered by Pinochet's henchmen — has taken the first step toward a new Guyanese cinema. Prior to 1976, the collective had been working on videotape and super 8 productions on the history of imperialism. When Prof. Rupert Roopnaraine returned to Guyana after a teaching tour in the USA, the collective seized this opportunity to make a film in and on Guyana. They researched their subject and presented a draft of the script to the Guyanese Ministry for Information and Culture. They wrote the following introduction to this script:

"The film will *portray* and *document*, through the combination and interpenetration of dramatic and ethnographic modes, the production and self-production of the Guyanese proletariat. Procured, in the first instance, by the importation of slaves and, following the abolition of slavery, by the introduction of the indentured immigrants, the Guyanese proletariat developed in direct proportion to the accumulation of surplus value within a dominantly monocultural colonial economic structure. The film will concentrate on the social and economic conditions against which the class-consciousness of the proletariat evolved."

"Focusing on three historical moments of developed antagonism between the exploited and the exploiters, the film will *portray* the organization, action, and eventual repression of the forces of liberation. Intervening periods of history will be treated so as to *document* the internal as well as the external struggles of the proletariat: the antagonism between rural peasantry and urban workers, the production of racial animosity based on this antagonism, the periods of unification and solidarity, the retaliatory violence and divisive strategies of the imperialists and their local instruments."

"The film consists of five interlocking parts or movements.

Parts One, Two, and Three consist each of two sections: the enactment and the historical documentation. The three dramatic sections (enactments) progress, in terms of acting and camera/sound techniques, from dramatic naturalism to epic alienation. The three documentary sections show an inverse progression, that is, from distanced ("objective") reportage to engaged ("subjective") narration. In Part Four the dialectic (between the dramatic and the ethnographic) is resolved in the recognition and rendition of the dramatic and partisan nature of the actual. Part Five will function as a systematic visual reconstitution of certain of the most charged images from Parts One through Four."

"The film will draw heavily on the music, painting, and literature of Guyana. The active participation of Guyanese scholars, technicians, and theatrical workers will be" indispensable to any adequate realization of the project.

The Guyanese Ministry for Information and Culture reacted favorably to this ambitious proposal, but given the meager budget of the Film Center, it could not finance the project (estimated production costs between \$150,000 and \$200,000). The members of the collective who had traveled with Roopnarine to Guyana decided to change the original idea. They proposed to the ministry the production of a less costly film based on one part of the original script: the anti-imperialist struggle of 1953. This project was approved and the collective received government help, which included film stock, equipment, laboratory, and editing facilities of the Film Center.

During the shooting, the collective interviewed those who had been involved in the 1953 struggle. Two of them are the current opposition leaders Eusi Kwayana (Working Peoples Alliance) and Cheddi Jagan (People's Progressive Party). Forbes Burnham, Guyana's current prime minister, was in the forefront of the struggle in 1953, but he refused the interview. The collective combined the interviews with news clippings, newsreel footage of Guyana, and the poetry and music of Guyanese artists and presented the rough cut to the Ministry for Information and Culture. The ministry asked the collective to eliminate the interviews with Kwayana and Jagan from the film. They refused, arguing that it would be ridiculous to deny the part played by Kwayana and Jagan in 1953 events for the sake of later political disagreements. With the threat of government censorship, the collective had no other option but to finish the film abroad. This meant financial difficulties, and it was under considerable strain that Part One of the three-part film *THE TERROR AND THE TIME* was finished in New York.

The film starts with a quote from Frantz Fanon:

"Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys

it."

Colonialism, form and content, destroys: these are the key words the Victor Jara Collective singled out from Fanon's quote. The film continues with the verbal and visual imagery of Martin Carter's poetry. Carter recited his poem "Cartman of Dayclean" as the film shows a cartman in the countryside, very early in the morning, on his way to the city market. Both the images and the poetry stand for the problematic relationship between the countryside and the city. The cartman is a familiar theme in pre-Industrial Revolution West European painting, and it is a theme that many Guyanese will recognize. Whereas in European painting the cartman is a symbol of the romantic past, with Carter the theme is contemporary.

As opposition politician Eusi Kwayana explains in the following sequence of the film:

"'The Cartman of Dayclean' is something that the whole rural population is very familiar with — the hardships of the cartman — the pain he goes through — the expectations of the journey."

Kwayana then points out how he sees the role of the poet:

"We saw the poet as an artist of a peculiar kind of sensitivity — who could make reality clearer to the rest of us ... A kind of ideological nourishment — so to speak."

We are next introduced to Cheddi Jagan (PPP), who gives detailed information about the situation of the Guyanese population in the late forties and early fifties. His conclusion is worth quoting:

"In 1942, the government had set up the Cost of Living Index Survey Committee. And it showed, revealed some very depressing statistics — that an average family of 4.5 persons was earning \$7.41 per week and was spending \$8.23 per week. The explanation for that was that the worker was always in debt, to the shopkeepers and other people, to the landlord, to whom he owed rent."

In a third interview with a woman worker, Halliman, she recalls what happened on the sugar plantation where she lived during the savagely suppressed strike in 1948. Combined with these three interviews are other elements of the film including newsreel footage of the period, headlines from Guyana's leading newspaper, the *Daily Argosy*, ads for fashion and cinema of the period (clearly aimed at the white upper-middle class), and songs of the period such as "Doggie in the Window." The filmmakers pit contrasting images against one another.

Colonialism, form and content, destroys: how are these key words elaborated in the rest of the film? First of all, the 1953 struggle in Guyana is not presented as a struggle typical of Guyana alone but is used

as a paradigm for the struggle against (British) colonialism. Also, the content of the film is a retelling of the suppressed history of Guyana. To give a part of Guyana's history back is to return to other countries, which have also suffered under colonialism a part of their history. Those who were directly involved knew that their struggle was an international one.

There is not only a continuous reference to (British) colonialism but also a continuous parallel drawn to the present situation in Guyana. During the Martin Carter poem "Nigger Yard," documentary images are shown that were taken of the Georgetown slums in 1976. One of these images is of a man dying on the streets as cars and human beings pass him by. One of the members of the Victor Jara Collective told me that while he was filming this dying man, he remembered vividly what the documentary filmmaker Joris Ivens had written on filming the Belgian mining area in Borinage; Ivens said:

"Filming is difficult. Our motive is not compassion for C's lot [a miner, Austin Cage, whose expulsion Ivens and Storck filmed] but to indict the mine owners, the banks, and the big exploiting capitalist concerns." [\[1\]](#)

Colonialism, form and content, destroys. THE TERROR AND THE TIME devotes much attention to the part the media played during the 1953 events. The same company owned the major radio station, Demerara, and the leading newspaper, the *Daily Argosy*. Consequently, the newsreels of the period — U.S. newsreels — presented any anticolonial struggle in the same way: stupid natives who are seduced by communists and have to be "saved" by interventions of the US and its allies. The film tells how the "media" of the People's Progressive Party — pamphlets, press, and, above all, the poetry of Martin Carter — were suppressed by the British. In his interview, Eusi Kwayana said:

"We would print these poems and circulate them, clandestinely. It had often to be done against the wishes of the police during the emergency because there was this whole attitude against so-called subversive literature. And a policeman in the emergency could seize anything on paper — you know, one would be writing something of political interest, and a policeman would raid the house and seize your thoughts, at the same time, and you would never see those thoughts again."

"But I laugh at them," wrote Martin Carter in one of his *Poems of Resistance*. And this is what THE TERROR AND THE TIME does at the right moments. First there are the newspaper ads on fashion and the cinema, and then the songs of the period are used at certain moments to break the tension. Even some of the newsreel footage with its Cold War commentary helps to bring a laugh, albeit a wry smile.

After the Victor Jara Collective finished the film under difficult circumstances, they had to find out through intensive distribution and

exhibition practice if the film could provide the same kind of "ideological nourishment" as Martin Carter's poetry did in the fifties. THE TERROR AND THE TIME has to be seen. If the film can create a sense of liberation in the spectators, help them speak freely about their experiences, it will serve its purpose. Of course, the film was made first for the Guyanese, but due to the repression in that country, it is very difficult to know if the film had an impact. Both Eusi Kwayana and Bill Carr (professor at the University of Georgetown) wrote enthusiastic reviews, but it would be interesting to see the film distributed to the working class in Guyana on a large scale.

In Great Britain and the Netherlands, the Victor Jara Collective initiated intensive distribution campaigns. The results were not only of interest to the collective itself but to any anti-imperialist campaign group using film in these two countries. I was present at a couple of screenings in the Netherlands and one in London. What struck me forcefully was that these West European intellectuals, who normally do their utmost to understand the work of bourgeois avant-garde filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Marguerite Duras, Chantal Akerman, and Jean-Marie Straub/Danielle Huillet, made no effort to understand this film. It did not seem to create a "sense of liberation" for them. On the other hand, for the people of the Caribbean in London and for the Surinamese in the Netherlands, the film sparked off enormous debates. This may seem surprising in the case of the Surinamese, considering there is no Dutch-subtitled version available. But the history of Surinam and its struggle against Dutch colonialism show many similarities with Guyana. THE TERROR AND THE TIME has the subtitle "Notes on Repressive Violence in Guyana," and it can teach us as much about the 1980s as it can about 1953 in that respect.

## Notes

[1.](#) Joris Ivens, "Jottings of a Film Producer," *International Theatre*, no. 3-4 (1934): 32.

### *The Terror and the Time* Poetry as weapon

by John Hess

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 35-36  
copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1981, 2005

#### POETRY AS WEAPON

— John Hess

"They came treading in the hoofmarks of the mule  
passing the ancient bridge  
the grave of pride  
the sudden flight  
the terror and the time."  
— Martin Carter

THE TERROR AND THE TIME is a breathtaking film, one that is so complex in its imagery — so poetic in fact — that I find it difficult to conjure up in words. Images appear first as simple denotation: a torch to light the way, a clock tower, urban slums, sugarcane fields. But then they accrue connotations with each reappearance until the torch is revolution, the clock tower is time, the slum is hades, and the cane fields signify the strength of the Guyanese people.

Like Martin Carter's poetry, which runs through the film as a sort of narration, the film is composed of loosely connected images (not randomly) which are both public and private, real and unreal, specific and general. And the power of the whole to evoke the suffering and the struggle of the people derives from the contradictions and the tensions in these images.

Example: in a short sequence two bits of documentary footage are intercut. In slow motion, silhouetted against an evening sky, men carry huge bundles of sugarcane up ramps and throw them down into waiting gondola cars. The cutting emphasizes the downward thrust of this backbreaking work. In the second bit, a man addresses a large crowd of workers. To underline his points he strikes downward with his right arm as if to hit a nonexistent podium. We don't hear his words; there is only percussion music on the soundtrack of this sequence.

At the most immediate level this is a beautifully edited short sequence, intercutting and thus associating two downward thrusting gestures. Yet at the next level, one — because of the slow motion, the darkness, the upward tilt of the camera, the rhythm — represents the harsh working conditions of the sugar estates while the second is clearly an exhortation to change those conditions.

"And so  
if you see me  
looking at your hands  
listening to you speak  
marching in your ranks  
you must know  
I do not sleep to dream, but dream to  
change the world."

The sequence does not stand by itself, however. It is a poetic transition between a sequence depicting slavery, accompanied by verses from Carter's "I Come from the Niggeryard," and a sequence showing how, for the first time since 1924, the East Indian sugar workers joined in solidarity with the African urban workers by going on strike and burning cane fields as an act of resistance.

Finally, the incredible economy of means in this series of sequences stands out. These filmmakers didn't have much to work with, but they made the most of it. Like Santiago Alvarez, whose work has clearly influenced them, these filmmakers have made the skimpy materials and resources available to them really work. They carefully planned what they wanted to do and aggressively tore into the documentary footage and pulled out only the images they wanted.

They have also created their own images (in addition to the interviews they did). They built one terrifying and astounding sequence — a mixture of Alvarez and Bruce Conner — around the image of a destitute man dying in a gutter as people and vehicles pass by, hardly noticing his agony and appeals for help. They shot the scene from two perspectives — one, a long shot from down the street; the other, a medium shot from across the intersection. They sped up (or step printed) the first shot to emphasize the uncaring passage of people and vehicles past the dying man. The second shot concentrates on his agony and gestured appeals for help.

They have intercut this material with a butcher chopping up meat on an outdoor chopping block and a series of newspaper ads for cosmetics and luxury goods. To top it all off they have put "How Much Is That Doggy in the Window?" on the soundtrack. It's a lengthy sequence which ends with the man collapsing on the final note of the music.

This sequence comes in the midst of a long section of the film on the repression of the duly elected PPP government by the British. Carter's "This Is the Dark Time My Love" sets the somber mood of the whole

section. While the sequence I'm discussing contains no images, verbal or visual, of the repression, it conveys the horror of it in ways that the preceding images of troops and barbed wire don't. The dying man, the chopped neat, the oblivious ads, and the banal North American popular song all strongly connote the physical and cultural crushing of a people — "the dark time."

But, as in all good poetry, it's more than that. There is a whole analysis of capitalism and imperialism available in the sequence, in the images of fragmentation, advertising, mass culture, alienation, and commodity fetishism. The sequence is as rich as it is horrifying and one needs to see it several times to fully comprehend it.

"This is what they do with me  
put me in prison, hide me away  
cut off the world, cut out the sun  
darken the land, blacken the flower  
stifle my breath and hope that I die!

After twenty days and twenty nights in prison  
you wake up and you search for birds and sunlight.  
You wait for rain and thunder  
and you think of home with pain inside your heart  
and your laugh has scorn more bitter than a curse."

Another remarkable sequence accompanies Carter's three letters from prison. A series of high contrast still and moving images of small windows, hallways, barred windows, barbed wire, stone walls, empty cells, and the play of light through small holes in pieces of metal used to cover tiny prison windows creates an incredible sense of confinement because of the agonizing beauty of the images. At the end of this sequence, Eusi Kwayana says,

"It's one thing to teach about the international working class  
in terms of political theory and history, quite another thing  
to make workers feel it emotionally. Carter did that."

And learning from Carter's verse, the Victor Jara Collective has learned how to make us feel things, too.

Finally, after a title indicating the end of Part One: Colonialism, there is a nearly ten-minute rift of images. Most of them are already familiar to the viewer but some are new. I'm told this is material for the next part of the intended three-part film. But I found the sequence breathtaking, a testament to how well the film works. The sequence makes an exciting coda to the present film and should stay where it is, perhaps coming before the title.

While I was watching and thinking about this film, one question returned often — what are the politics of this film? I address this question here not as some sort of ultimate question, although I think it is very important, but because it seems a puzzle. As with much third-

world nationalist and anti-imperialist art — say Carter's or Ernesto Cardenal's poetry or Alvarez's films — it's much clearer what people are against than what they are for. In the heat of the struggle, naturally enough, they create a kind of Manichaean purity designed to include as many as possible on the right side while pumping them up for the battle. There is usually little or no analysis of either side or even the nature of the struggle. You don't expect poetry to analyze, nor perhaps the agit-films of Alvarez, but a feature-length political documentary is different. It's not usually made for the immediate struggle, for the moment, but rather for more leisurely contemplation.

Clearly *TERROR AND THE TIME* does analyze, or at least does describe quite clearly, the nature of British imperialism in Guyana. And it clearly intervenes in a number of political struggles. In his interview here, Rupert Roopnaraine talks about the struggle against the bourgeois (Hollywood) film. He and Bert Hogenkamp, in the latter's review, both discuss the importance of recapturing history. And the film emphasizes this point by opening with a quote by Fanon. The film also contributes to the important struggles in Guyana against sexism and racial divisions. Yet I still feel that something important is missing.

The People's Progressive Party won the elections of 1953 overwhelmingly but in a few months was overthrown by British Imperialism. There was no struggle, no guerrilla war, no significant resistance. This is in stark contrast to the many other anti-imperialist struggles referred to in the film: Kenya, Malaya, Cuba. Vietnam — where guerrilla war was central to the struggle. What does this mean? Was the PPP naive or misguided, or did they take a calculated risk and lose? What did Guyanese socialists learn from this experience? These questions are not addressed in the film. Although I imagine that there were many practical and political reasons for this omission, it still seems a serious one to me.

In spite of this criticism, I find *TERROR AND THE TIME* one of the most innovative and interesting political documentaries since *HOUR OF THE FURNACES*, which clearly influenced it in positive ways. The film deserves wide distribution, and anyone interested in the third-world struggle for liberation and in political filmmaking should see it.

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#### CARTMAN OF DAYCLEAN.

Now to begin the road:  
broken land ripped like a piece of cloth  
iron cartwheel rumbling in the night  
hidden man consistent in the dark  
sea of dayclean washing on the shore  
heart of orphan seeking orphanage.

Now to begin the road:  
the bleeding music of appellant man  
starts like a song but fades into a groan.

The cupric star will burn as blue as death.  
His hopes are whitened starched with grief and pain  
yet questing men is heavy laden cart  
whose iron wheels will rumble in the night  
whose iron wheel will spark against the stone  
or granite burden of the universe.

Now to begin the road:  
hidden cartman fumbling for a star  
brooding city like a mound of coal  
till journey done, till prostrate coughing hour  
with sudden welcome take him to his dream  
with sudden farwell send him to his grave.

— Martin Carter

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### *The Terror and the Time* Interview with Rupert Roopnaraine

by Monica Jardine and Andaiye

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 36-38  
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The following interview with Rupert Roopnaraine, director of the film *THE TERROR AND THE TIME*, was conducted by Monica Jardine and Andaiye in New York City in September 1977 while the film was being edited. It was published in the *Georgetown Review* (Guyana) 2, no 1 (August 1978). We have edited it for length. — The Editors

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: You know that even among progressive artists there often remains a belief that art, "by its very nature," must be an individualized production. Can you tell us how you see this question and how your effort at collective filmmaking has worked in practice?

ROOPNARAIN: The main thing is that artistic production is a social process. The conception of the artist as lone ranger driven by the demons of creation is a bourgeois conception of artistic production; it belongs to the same worldview which seriously proposes Robinson Crusoe as an example of what economic production is about.

We wanted to carry further our understanding of art as social production by confronting the conventional work practices of bourgeois film production. Clearly this can be seen as an ideological preference that had already reached some level of actualization from our previous experience of working together. But I want to stress other elements in the decision: the level of efficiency we were able to reach because of our attempts to overcome the retarding consequences of a rigid, hierarchical division of labor; the necessity to approach the work in this way when you have to make a film on an economy budget with few "trained professionals"; finally, that collectivizing the work process enhanced the commitment of the core people to the project, a commitment that extended itself to other comrades who joined us in working to produce the film. Yet it would be idealistic and dishonest to deny that this was an

uneven process or to claim that every member's intervention at every level was equal. We all had to develop skills, not only in technological aspects like light reading, sound recording, video transfer, etc., but in research, scriptwriting, and editing. We set aside time for practical instruction in the technology of filmmaking. But at times we had no alternative but to rely on the technological skills of our professional comrades. Because of the kind of film we wanted to produce, we had to have regular theoretical study sessions on the revolutionary tradition of filmmaking within which we wanted to situate the film. Of course, in this struggle for theoretical understanding, there were frequent ideological interventions of the very kind we were trying to fight against. But the commitment to struggle remains, and that is the important thing.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: Who was Victor Jara, and what was the significance of naming the collective after him?

ROOPNARAINIE; Victor Jara was one of the revolutionary working-class artists who emerged as part of the creative cultural explosion during the Allende years in Chile. He was a popular poet, guitarist, and folksinger and a militant who was murdered by the fascists.

Since one of our primary concerns is with cultural violence and the relationship of art to struggle, we could not have chosen a more appropriate emblem. There is a sequence in the closing minutes of the film when we see a Viet Cong guerrilla unit resting after days of marching and fighting. Two women are performing a peasant dance for their comrades. Immediately after the dance ends, they all shoulder their rifles and set off for the next confrontation with the French invaders. This sequence expresses very clearly how revolutionary art integrates with political struggle. We cannot ignore the very real differences between Vietnam and Guyana (even in 1953). Our point is that art has a political function and does not lose its artistic value when it becomes self-conscious about situating itself politically.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: How do you respond to the criticism that the title of the film implies a greater level of aggression against the Guyanese people than the facts, or the film, warrant?

ROOPNARAINIE: There are a number of responses that come to mind. To begin with, *THE TERROR AND THE TIME* addresses more than the specific aggression against the Guyanese working people in 1953. We tried to situate that aggression in a wider context of imperialist violence at the time. The film draws attention to the aggression against the Iranian people which culminated in the violent overthrow of the Mossadegh government, to the aggression against the Kenyan working people in the terrorist violence against its Mau Mau liberation fighters, to the French aggression against the Vietnamese working people in the brutal attacks against its patriotic revolutionaries. Looked at from a global perspective, the terror seems real enough to satisfy even the most benumbed. The second and main aspect of naming the film *THE TERROR AND THE TIME* is that, for us to move toward a more

precisely formulated theory of liberation, we need to examine with strict patience and great discipline the moment which, after all, spawned the neocolonial state. The title, THE TERROR AND THE TIME, suggests that 1953 is a moment "unto itself," a concentrated expression of imperialist aggression in a particular conjuncture, as well as a critical point in our ongoing process which unites 1953 with 1977.

If we wanted any demonstration of the necessity to situate the terror of 1953 in this way, we found it in our practical work experience. We had intended to open this film with school children talking about what they knew of 1953. We actually filmed some interviews with young school children in the Corentyne and in Georgetown. We discovered to our horror that they did not even know that British troops had invaded the country in 1953.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: Then you see the film as part of an attempt to combat what you have called the erasure of the past?

ROOPNARAIN: Exactly. A film, like any form of artistic production, is consciously or unconsciously an intervention into a specific conjuncture, an intrusion into a set of existing concrete relations. The *Poems of Resistance* was such an art/act. Obviously, any art produced as part of a struggle is conscious of this intervention and takes it into account. Now we have to be constantly aware of the nature of the context into which any artistic production is going to intervene. The context into which the film will intervene now includes, on the one hand, the ruling party's attempt at complete control over consciousness production by its ownership of the media and its use of those media and of educational institutions to falsify both past and present. But the context also includes the organized refusal of conscious people to be either duped or silenced. The film concentrates on consciousness production in the colonial period as part of the current contestation of the consciousness production of the party which today rules in Guyana. We are in effect taking sides with those forces now struggling to combat the continued underdevelopment of the minds of the Guyanese working people.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: What you've been saying about artistic production implies that the concept of revolutionary art embraces more than the "content" of that art, that a new relationship of form is a part of the contestation of bourgeois consciousness production. Let's talk about how you deal with narration in Part One, where you have no narration in the traditional sense but use the poet as narrator. Why?

ROOPNARAIN: For a number of reasons we rejected right from the beginning the idea of a traditional narrator. Several people have urged us, at various points along the way, to use a narrator for exposition and analysis. But we remain convinced that an external narrator would violate structural principles which order this section of the film. The so-called "objective" narrator of the average industrial documentary can be, and almost always is, a totalitarian device. Narrators induce passivity and docile compliance. They encourage the viewers to treat the film they are watching as alienated spectacle, a product outside of themselves

designed for inert consumption. There have been the rare exceptions where the narrator is a self-conscious device, a full sign of the filmmaker's own presence in the production. In this kind of revolutionary application, the narrator, in the act of self-situation, summons the viewer into active appropriation. But this is a tactical and immobilizing power of the traditional narrator. Now part of what we reject when we reject the device of the objective narrator who explains and clarifies everything is precisely this master/slave notion of pedagogy.

Instead of abolishing the freedom of the spectator, we have chosen to emphasize that freedom, to assert it at every level. Consequently we have organized the film in such a way as to insist, as a prerequisite for understanding and action, on the active participation of the viewer in the production. The film, considered now as a process whose completion is achieved only in the act of consumption, relies on the viewer to perceive connections and relations. It invites practice, not acquiescence and passivity. The imposition of a narrator would have violated this principle.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: The editing was obviously carefully and deliberately designed to produce something other than a formal plot or, structure. Why?

ROOPNARAIN: Simply because we were attempting to negate, at all levels, the type of Hollywood film-as-spectacle which functions according to particular principles of plot and structure. We aimed for an assertive editing technique, rapid and percussive in some places, slow and lyrical in others. It is all a question of meaning. To take an example from the film: the cartman sequence that opens the film is edited, for the most part, in what you have called an orthodox way: long and medium shots, dissolves, a linear progression of images, a moment from darkness to light, and so on. There are two reasons for this: first, the interpretation we have given the poem and, secondly, the strategic situation of the cartman poem/sequence in the overall structure of the film. The poem speaks of the "hidden cartman consistent in the dark." We took our cue from that "consistent." Restoring to the word its strict etymological meaning, we took the cartman's consistency in the dark to mean a kind of integration of man in his world, a moment of oneness and cohesion.

We then moved from this dominant idea of cohesion to its dialectical opposite, fragmentation. We now had our "plot": cohesion to fragmentation. The task then was to concretize these abstractions. So for cohesion we supplied the content: place of production/ nature/ country; for fragmentation: place of exchange and alienation/ culture/ town. The descent of the cartman — and the poem suggests it's an epic descent — is from the secure countryside, where he has known control over the processes of nature, to the noisy marketplace, where not only his products are alienated in exchange but where his own control is lost. We end with an epic plot: from birth to death. So you see, the decisions we

make in terms of editing, decisions of pace, of spot perspective and distance, are determined by considerations of meaning and interpretation. But the process doesn't end there. We begin from some fairly abstract concept and set about accumulating and organizing the images and sounds to serve that concept. But then the organization of the material impacts back on to the concept and influences the meaning in turn. You are right. The film is very deliberately plotted. Again, what we reject is not plot or structure but a particular kind of plot and structure.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: Do you think that the working class will find this film difficult to understand?

ROOPNARAIN: Undoubtedly. In terms of what we have been saying about the films shown in the commercial cinemas, how can it be otherwise? The film will be difficult and unusual because the Guyanese and Caribbean working people have been denied exposure to films of this kind. We are struggling against film-viewing habits and expectations formed over decades. It is a question of making available to the public alternative types of film language. And what we're talking about will involve many long years of work. You know, even after the Cuban revolution had become a fact and the Cuban people were becoming conscious of what socialism was, they went right on seeing the Mexican and Hollywood films until the blockade in 1961. We are hoping that this film will contribute to the cultural struggle here in Guyana by opening the possibilities of different types of film language, by demonstrating what a cinema in the service of the working class is capable of.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: There has always been in Guyana a kind of tension — among working-class and peasant Africans and Indians in particular — between a concretely shared life of day-by-day oppression and an equally real separation at the occupational, social, and cultural levels, and this even in moments of political solidarity. The question now — do you think that Part One ignores or downplays the divisions between the two groups in the interests of revealing the other side of what we have called the tension?

ROOPNARAIN: We spoke earlier of the self-reflexive dimension of the film, its conscious self-situation, the way in which its production is enmeshed in the relations of 1976 even when its object is 1953. Now it is well known that in Guyana today the crisis in race relations is a dominant element in the larger structural crisis. No one even seriously bothers to dispute that anymore. It is not that we chose to ignore or underplay the real racial divisions and fragmentation of the period. No, what we chose to do was to emphasize the positive achievements of the 1953 moment.

One of those achievements, brief though it was, and coming only after long years of struggle and many serious defeats, was the unification of the working people in 1953. This assertion of class solidarity over racial division has occurred on a less developed scale only once before, in the

1924 convulsions when the wharf workers and stevedores went on the great waterfront strike. On that occasion large contingents of sugar workers joined in the huge demonstrations on April 1 in Georgetown. The colonial state machinery reacted then with much the same reflexes as the PNC today: intervention of the military, arrests, and widespread repression. The film celebrates the achievement of a relatively harmonious working relation between our two major races. The colonial state responded by driving a wedge into the militant workers movement, pitting African against Indian, town against country, worker against worker. The race riots of the sixties, sponsored and engineered by the CIA this time, were a direct extension of this policy of division. And so the film invites the working people to dwell on images of symbiosis and solidarity, to experience imaginatively the potential energy of a united working class movement.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: A number of your images focus on women working. Are you making a point about the sexual division of labor?

ROOPNARAIN: The sisters in the collective never permitted us to lose sight of the fact of women's oppression or to underplay their role in the struggle against oppression. They constantly forced us to confront, within the collective itself, the problems arising from the sexual division of labor. The film emphasizes something which we, products of male supremacist society, are too prone to overlook, namely, that the women and children in class society are the colonized of the colonized, victims of a double oppression. We chose a woman worker (Halliman) to describe the conditions of labor on the sugar estates in the colonial period. She speaks for the entire class both as a member of the oppressed class and as an oppressed member within that class.

The section of the film we are describing also provides the key to other sections where the particular oppression of women is seen as the most profound and damaging aspect of the more general oppression. The film tries to explore — mainly through an analysis of newspaper advertisements directed at women, fashion photographs, and sex-film displays — the particular strategies of cultural violence, racist and sexist strategies, designed to produce distorted and diseased self-images. Imagine the grotesque situation of the Guyanese women, day after hot, sunny day, turning to the women's page of the *Daily Argosy* and being asked to marvel at the latest Parisian fur hats for winter or the new tweeds for the autumn collection in London. We also chose to take account, in the African and Vietnamese images at the end of the film, of the women's role in the liberation struggles. The Chinese say that women hold up half of the sky. The film struggles not to forget this.

JARDINE/ANDAIYE: We can argue that artistic production in Guyana in the 1950s had a definite grounding in the vitality of the mass movement and that the retreat of the movement after 1953 was reflected in artistic production and cultural expression in the country after that time. Do you see this film — THE TERROR AND THE TIME — as an isolated piece of work or as part of a new creative upsurge itself, both

agent and reflection of a renewed vitality in the Guyanese working-class struggle?

ROOPNARAIN: The point is irrefutable. Working-class production as a whole, of which artistic production is a part, has never been anything other than alienated production in Guyana. The surge of creative activity in the colonial period was a vital and dynamizing element of the liberation movement. The cultural production of the period understood itself as an antagonistic and contestatory production. But, even so, these were imprinted with the contradictions of the period, both the internal contradictions within the liberation movement itself and the external contradictions arising out of the confrontation with colonialism. But even within these limits, the art of the period actively participated in the creative energy of the moment.

The official cultural production of this period — from independence to today — has been in essence an extension of the cultural production of the colonizers. It is again a question, as it has been throughout our history, of two contending sets of cultural production, each stamped by its specific class character. We can describe the official cultural products as celebratory, ornamental, and designed to mystify reality and confuse the people. It is unreasonable to expect that the cultural production of the dominating petty bourgeoisie would escape the moral and intellectual prevarication of that class. But the dominated culture of the working class, which for many years has been sporadic in production and turned in on itself, is again emerging as a vital and dynamizing element of an intensifying class struggle. As we might expect in a society where the working class is systematically excluded from creative participation in all spheres of production, the cultural activity of the people is still a repressed, marginal activity and will enter into the mainstream of cultural production only as other relations are shattered and recomposed of the working class in its own interests.

We definitely see the film as an active expression of class struggle and participating in the renewed energy of the working-class movement. It is a very concrete expression of that energy in the sense that it could never have been produced without the militant collaboration of working people's organizations in Guyana and to a lesser extent in the other neocolonial Caribbean territories and in the United States.

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### **Victor Jara Collective update**

**by Lewanne Jones**

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 38

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In the past twelve months the Guyanese have witnessed an intensification of the economic and political crisis which has plagued the country throughout the seventies. The long overdue national elections were held in December of 1980. The opposition split over the question of participation in what was generally acknowledged to be an "un-free and un-fair" election. The People's Progressive Party decided to put up candidates, while the Working People's Alliance, together with some smaller parties, decided to boycott. A team of international observers from the Caribbean, North America and Great Britain were present and documented the abuses at every level.

Early in 1981, a long outstanding border dispute with neighboring Venezuela was reopened. A treaty signed in 1889 between the British colonial government and Venezuela is soon to expire, and the Venezuelans are claiming over half of present day Guyana's territory. The Burnham government has refused to negotiate in good faith, and relations between the two countries are deteriorating. Several border incidents have been reported and the Burnham regime is using the issue as another excuse to militarize the country even further.

The opposition recognizes this as a very serious matter. The Working People's Alliance is calling on the working classes of both Guyana and Venezuela to recognize the problem as one begun by the colonialists and imperialists. They are also appealing to the international community to recognize that the Burnham government has no legitimacy and therefore cannot handle the problem.

Despite Guyana's enormous balance of payments deficit and its recent history of failures to meet IMF stipulations, international monetary agencies are continuing to lend large amounts of money to prop up the Burnham regime. Basic commodities are chronically scarce and prices have risen drastically. The Guyana dollar which for a long time was pegged to the U.S. dollar was recently devalued by over 30% and there is talk of still further devaluation. The Working People's Alliance is conducting a campaign throughout the country for a living wage. Since

1978 the government has failed to fulfill a promise to raise the minimum wage, which for the Guyanese workers lucky enough to make even the minimum is the equivalent of \$3 U.S. per day.

Almost exactly one year after the assassination of Walter Rodney, his co-defendants in the arson trial won a victory in the Guyana courts. The charges against Rupert Roopnaraine and Omawale, accused of burning down the Ministry of National Development (where election records and the offices of the ruling party are housed), were dismissed by the magistrate as insubstantial and lacking in evidence. Shortly after the dismissal of the case, both Roopnaraine and Omawale were prevented by the government from the leaving the country. Roopnaraine succeeded in traveling to Europe via what has become known as the "Rodney airport." (Shortly before his death, Rodney had, surreptitiously left the country to attend independence celebrations in Zimbabwe.) While in Europe, Roopnaraine was able to speak to public meetings and journalists in Britain, Holland, France and Germany.

In Guyana, Roopnaraine still has his appointment at the University of Guyana where he lectures mainly on literature and philosophy. He is also an extremely active member of the Working People's Alliance, serving on the Central Committee, as well as the political and educational bureaus of the party.

During the production of the first part of THE TERROR AND THE TIME, the Victor Jara Collective realized that the project would not really be complete without two further sections. Materials for these sections — "Neocolonialism" and "Organizing Notes for Liberation — were collected during 1976-77. As a result of financial debts incurred for the first part and the scattering of the Collective's members, this work has not yet begun. Since the death of Walter Rodney in 1980, members of the Collective in Georgetown, New York, Amsterdam, and San Francisco have been investigating the possibilities of gathering additional materials and beginning work on the project.

The present idea is to make a second film, which will analyze Guyana's history and present situation through the life and work of Walter Rodney. His important works on imperialism and underdevelopment, African, Caribbean, and Guyanese history and culture will inform the analysis. The film will also attempt to deal with the spirit of Rodney's personal intervention in active politics of Guyana and elsewhere. At present, a proposal is circulating, fundraising has successfully begun, and the Collective is attempting to pool the various resources at its disposal. Various individuals have been contacted and are willing to donate artwork, music and poetry. The Collective faces a rather large obstacle in that filmmakers are not free to operate in Guyana, where the Burnham regime keeps a tight stranglehold on all aspects of the media. However, the Collective is confident that through research in film archives and libraries abroad, and with the assistance of friends throughout the Caribbean, most of the obstacles can be overcome.

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### Prometheus Film Collective (1925-1932) German communist *Kinokultur*, pt.1

by Jan-Christopher Horak

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 39-41

copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1981, 2005

Directly influenced by the revolutionary Soviet films of the twenties, as well as a radical tradition in Berlin's arts and theater, the work of the Prometheus Film Collective attempted to fuse documentary agit-prop and proletarian melodrama, fictionalized documents, and documentary fiction. Furthermore, a number of Soviet-German co-productions and the groundbreaking distribution of Soviet Films in Western Europe demonstrated the collective's cross-fertilization efforts. Yet the collective also manifested the struggles and sensibilities of Berlin's leftist culture. Best exemplified by such artists as Heinrich Zille, Käthe Kollwitz, John Heartfield, and Georg Grosz, the theater of Brecht, Erwin Piscator, and Slatan Dudow, as well as the popular Workers International Relief Press, this culture practiced a radical critique of Weimer society through new, experimental forms.

That Weimar Germany's Marxist film/art movements are virtually unknown outside Germany, and barely acknowledged in the Federal Republic, may lie in the (for bourgeois liberal critics) uncomfortable fact that this tradition is indivisibly connected to the cultural policies of the German Communist Party (KPD). Part I of this history, then, will attempt to outline the Prometheus Film Collective's first tentative steps towards achieving a synthesis of documentary and fiction. Part II will analyze in detail the culmination of these efforts in the collective's most successful film, *MOTHER KRAUSE'S JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS* (1929).

On November 9, 1918, the Spartacist Karl Liebknecht proclaimed the German Soviet Republic, two hours before Gustav Stresemann a few blocks away called out a parliamentary democracy in the name of Social Democracy at the time the Social Democrats under Friedrich Ebert (majority Socialists, Independent Socialists, Spartacists) controlled close to 50% of the German electorate. But Ebert, whose love for the Fatherland had led him to throw the SDP's support behind the Kaiser's "defensive war" in 1914, now called upon the counterrevolutionary Freikorps to maintain law and order. Six months later, with Liebknecht

and Luxemburg murdered in Berlin and Kurt Eisner, leader of the shortlived Bavarian Soviet Republic, murdered in Munich, the reactionary status quo was reestablished.

Out of the rubble arose a newly formed KPD in the early twenties which developed into a tightly knit, hierarchically structured party machine, dedicated to social revolution through radical obstruction in the Reichstag. Under this policy, unemployment, working conditions, housing, health, social privilege, and militarism became the immediate social issues with which to raise class consciousness and politically engage the proletariat. Outside on the streets an extremely active party corps organized strikes, walkouts, and demonstrations as well as worker's theaters, lecture evenings, film viewings, and garden festivals. The active harassment of the KPD through the police and the reactionary judiciary, culminating in the "Bloody May" of 1929, only substantiated the continuing threat to the ruling classes posed by a politicized proletariat. The ultranationalist and fascist Right, on the other hand, were treated with kid gloves, as evidenced by the fact that of the 354 political murders committed by Rightists in the first four years of the Republic, only 24 were even prosecuted and only 1 solitary assassin served his full sentence. [\[1\]](#)

After the failure in 1919, the revolutionary artists and intellectuals realized the importance of intensifying class struggle in various arts and media. The elements of popular culture, the daily press, the publishing houses, the film and theater industry, controlled by monopoly capitalist and militarist interests, functioned as weapons against the working class. It was necessary, then, to meet the ruling class on its own turf, seize the means of production, and turn then against those in power.

Nineteen twenty saw Erwin Piscator's Proletarian Theater produce the first agit-prop play, "Russia's Day," a collectively written piece advocating solidarity against the international white terror. [\[2\]](#) By the mid-twenties, Piscator was experimenting with multimedia agit-prop, using a montage of slides, posters, film, and theater in such productions as Leo Lania's "Economics," Alfons Paquet's "Storm Floods," and Ernst Toller's "Hurrah, We're Alive." At the same time a large number of local nonprofessional workers' theater groups, e.g., "The Red Rockets" and "The Red Megaphone." sprang up, all modeled on the Soviet *agitki* "The Blue Shirts," whose tour of Germany had been highly successful. Most of the theater groups were at least unofficially connected to the KPD through various organizations, most notably the Workers International Relief (Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe), under the directorship of Willi Münzenberg.

Münzenberg, a member of the (PD Central Committee, had been asked in 1921 by Lenin to establish the WIR in an effort to coordinate various food projects for the starving Soviet. Officially an independent organization, the WIR soon supported workers' strikes in sixteen countries, including the United States. By establishing a "red mass media combine," Münzenberg also set the WIR the difficult task of

breaking the bourgeois mass media's monopoly on information dissemination. It was precisely because of financial instability and judicial harassment that such radical leftist magazines as Heartfield and Grosz's *Die Pleite* (1919) soon folded. A stronger base of financial support was evidently needed.

In 1925 the WIR paper expanded to become the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (*Worker's Illustrated*). Produced by working-class photographers and writers, the AIZ soon boasted a circulation of over 500,000 readers. A year later Münzenberg acquired the ailing *Welt am Abend* (*Evening World*) and raised its circulation from 3,000 to over 100,000. [3] By 1931 the WIR controlled the AIZ, *Welt am Abend*, *Berlin am Morgen* (*Berlin Morning*), *Der Eulenspiegel* (a humor magazine), *Der Rote Aufbau* (*Red Construction*), *Der Arbeiter Fotograf* (*Worker Photographer*), and *Der Weg der Frau* (*A Woman's Path*), as well as a publishing house, New German Publishers (Neuer Deutscher Verlag). Unlike the KPD's party organ, *Die Rote Fahne* (*Red Flag*), Münzenberg's publications could use the talents of leftists and liberals to mix radical politics with a free "boulevard press" style of journalism. Offering artistic and literary contributions to broaden their base of support, the WIR publications soon acted as spokesman for numerous leftwing factions. The WIR was soon nicknamed the "Münzenberg Combine," controllers of the giant Ufa film studios and a publishing empire. Münzenberg countered:

"All economic enterprises of the revolutionary proletariat are only means to a goal of intensifying revolutionary agitation. This is our one and only goal." [4]

The development of a class-conscious film collective, however, proved more difficult, possibly because of the extensive financial means necessary for production. Not that the KPD wasn't aware of the vast propaganda possibilities of the most popular mass media. At the Independent Socialist-KPD Unification Congress in 1920, Klara Zetkin pointed out:

"We must develop the great cultural possibilities of the cinema through revolutionary consciousness. Though a revolutionary consciousness doesn't however mean that we should take the bourgeois film and simply turn it around by presenting the burgher as a devil, and the proletariat as angels. The cinema must reflect social reality, instead of the lies and fairytales with which the bourgeois cinema enchants and deceives the working man." [5]

Not surprisingly, it was Willi Münzenberg who took the first steps in realizing a Marxist film policy. In 1922 he founded the Reconstruction and Commerce, Inc. (Aufbau Industrie and Handels A.G.) to buy Soviet distribution rights for German films. Two years later the WIR financed the establishment of the Mezhrabpom-Russ in Moscow, which soon began production of such Soviet classics as Prozanoy's *AELITA* (1924) and Pudovkin's *MOTHER* (1926). Münzenberg's WIR pamphlet,

*Conquer the Film!* (1925), outlined guidelines for a practical film propaganda, while shortly before Münzenberg, Richard Pfeifer, and Emil Unfried founded the Prometheus Film Company. A merger of three firms had brought about the new film unit: Reconstruction, the Deka-Schatz Co., which had just produced a short about the Red Fighters League, and the Prometheus, a KPD-owned unit which had produced one short, NAMELESS HEROES (1925). The Prometheus was registered at the Bureau of Commerce on February 2, 1926, with a capital investment of 10,000 Reichs Marks. Ironically, while these very capitalistic-sounding methods guaranteed a legal basis for operation, since the studios and labs were in the hands of bourgeois entrepreneurs, the internal structure of the Prometheus remained collectivist.

Responsible for cinematography and direction on almost all of the collective's early shorts, Piel Jützi was unmistakably a guiding force in the Prometheus. After arriving from Heidelberg, where he directed a few cheap westerns and detective films, Jützi received a camera from Münzenberg in 1922 to shoot WIR events in Berlin. Others working for the collective included the directors Albrecht Viktor Blum, J. A. Hübler-Kahla, Carl Junghans, and Slatan Dudow; the writers Bela Balazs, Leo Lania, Bert Brecht, Ernst Ottwalt, Willi Doell, and Jan Fethke; the set designers Carl Haaker and Robert Scharfenberg; the composers Paul Dessau, Hanns Eisler, and Edmund Maisel; the actors Holmes Zimmermann, Hertha Thiele, Lisi Arna, Gerhard Bienert, and Friedrich Gnass. If one includes all those who offered their services for one project or another, practically everyone in Berlin's radical arts community contributed. Their work usually went unpaid because of chronically lacking funds.

Soon after its founding, the Prometheus released, in conjunction with the Mezhrabpom-Russ, the first German-Soviet co-production, SUPERFLUOUS HUMANS (1926), directed by Alexander Razumni. Although the cast included such popular stars as Werner Krauss, Heinrich George, and Fritz Rasp, the story of boring small-town petit bourgeoisie was so ineptly directed that not even *The Red Flag* could muster up any enthusiasm. The Prometheus also produced two fictional shorts, KLADD AND DATSCH (Jützi) and MIRACLE OF LOVE (Samuelson). The use of popular stars in these productions indicated that the Prometheus hoped to achieve box office success in order to survive in the capitalist film market. Piscator, too, complained that he was forced to use stars in his political theater since a working-class audience alone couldn't subsidize his productions. [\[6\]](#) The Prometheus was in fact only applying the strategy of the Münzenberg press, i.e., mixing propaganda with a popular format.

In 1927 this policy of hiring leftist artists to make popular films with a socially critical tendency continued with Eckstein's THE FOREIGN GIRL, Balazs' ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS THREE, Bernhardt's SCHINDERHANNES (1928), and Leo Mittler's HARBOR DRIFT (1929), the latter three films starring the very popular actress, Lisa Arna. While conforming to the popular demand for sentimentality, melodramatic

plotting, and stars, these films were for the most part far more honest in their depiction of social reality than the Ufa's fetishistic fantasies. HARBOR DRIFT, for example, included documentary scenes of jobless workers in Hamburg, while SCHINDERHANNES told the story of a seventeenth-century German rebel.

Next the Prometheus established a subsidiary, the Weltfilm, for its noncommercial distribution. Through the Weltfilm, working-class organizations were supplied with the Prometheus's activist films, as well as selected socially critical films of bourgeois producers. Addressing social issues more directly, or reporting WIR/KPD organized events, the Weltfilm's short documentaries and fictional shorts provided a political context for the Prometheus's feature films. THE RED FRONT MARCHES AGAINST WAR AND FASCISM (1927, Jützi), RED PENTACOST (1928, Junghans), and 100,000 UNDER RED FLAGS (1929, Weltfilm) were simply newsreels. Interestingly, RED PENTACOST included a fictional scene involving a Frau Lehmann organizing sleeping quarters for Red Front Fighters League delegates. THE RED CAMERA (1928, Hubler-Kahla) was commissioned as a (PD election film while FACTS (1930, Blum) and BLOODY MAY (1929, Jützi) sandwiched agitation between advertising for the AIZ and *The Red Flag*, respectively. Shorts such as KLADD AND DATSCH (unemployment) concentrated on one particular issue in a semidocumentary, semifictional manner with varying degrees of success. Other films in this vein were CHILDREN'S TRAGEDY (1926, Jützi, juvenile delinquency), THE DEATH MINE (1930, Jützi, working conditions), and HOW THE BERLIN WORKER LIVES (1930, Dudow, housing). Of CHILDREN'S TRAGEDY the historian Jerzy Toeplitz wrote: "The proletarian environment remains a mere backdrop for a naive fable of a young runaway." [\[7\]](#)

The Prometheus also continued co-producing with the Mezhrabpom, releasing Fedor Ozep's THE LIVING CORPSE (1928), starring Pudovkin and Maria Jacobini. Despite occasional montage sequences connecting church, state, and judiciary in a conspiracy against liberalized divorce laws, however, Ozep's pacing pointed towards an emphasis on abnormal psychology rather than social repression. As played by Pudovkin, Tolstoy's hero suffered much *Weltschmerz* at the hands of bourgeois morality and decadence (prostitution, pornography) but gave the audience little chance to analyze the concrete historical reality. Another co-production. SALAMANDER (1928, Gregori Roshal), co-scripted by the Soviet Minister of Culture, Anatoli Lunacharski, was banned in January 1929 because it was supposedly anti-German. Starring Bernard Goetzke, the film related the persecution of a German university professor studying salamanders because he advances a theory of social evolution in the face of hereditary Prussian Junkerism. A happy end had the professor emigrate to the Soviet Union, a fate which became reality for many a few years later. [\[8\]](#) Both SALAMANDER and THE LIVING CORPSE were co-photographed by Jützi.

It was not the first time the Prometheus ran up against the reactionary

judiciary's attempted censorship maneuvers. Already in May 1926 the German courts slapped an injunction on Eisenstein's POTEMKIN. After numerous court battles, and strong public support from liberal critics, a shortened version was introduced to German audiences. [9] Later the Prometheus distributed TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD, STORM OVER ASIA, THE GENERAL LINE, BED AND SOFA, EARTH, THE BLUE EXPRESS, etc. Over forty Sovkino/Mezhrabpom productions were distributed by the Prometheus between 1926 and 1931. It must be admitted, however, that some of these films, directed by such older-generation directors as Tarich, Razumni, Gardin, and Protazanov, could hardly be called revolutionary.

All these activities were commercially successful up to a certain point. Even critical failures like Gardin's POET AND TSAR (1927) or Protazanov's MAN FROM THE RESTAURANT (1927) earned handsomely. [10] In 1926-1927 the Prometheus produced nine films and distributed sixteen features and shorts, allowing them to raise their capital assets to 100,000 Reichs Marks in the fiscal year 1928. On paper at least, the Prometheus appeared to be one of the financially more solvent producers in Germany. In its best year, 1928-1929, the Prometheus produced or co-produced fifteen films and distributed as many Soviet and (a few) American films, [11] a small figure compared to over 500 films sold by the Ufa in the same period. Unlike the WIR's other enterprises, though, the Prometheus still suffered from a chronic money shortage. Münzenberg constantly ran into trouble with Soviet export commissars because he would cover the collective's expenses with hard currency profits from Soviet rentals and then pay the Soviets in rubles taken from the Mezhrabpom coffers. [12] With the introduction of sound, production costs skyrocketed because the Tobis-Klangfilm, the owner of all German sound patents, extorted high fees to protect its monopoly. Thus, the collective had to limit itself to educational shorts and to importing a few Soviet features. In January 1932, shortly before filming concluded on Brecht's KUHLE WAMPE (1932, Slatan Dudow), the Prometheus went bankrupt, forcing the directors to complete the film independently.

A number of economic and political issues affected the collective's demise. First, the Prometheus was forced to comply with the so-called "Kontingentsgesetz", an import quota system which forbade German film companies from importing more films than they themselves produced. Thus, the Prometheus's main source of income, the Soviet film rentals, was severely limited. Secondly, without their own exhibition outlets, the Prometheus was at the mercy of German theater owners, many of whom refused to screen "Bolshevik" films. Others feared reprisals from Nazi hoodlums. Much of the press remained cool, others openly hostile to the Prometheus. The liberal *Lichtbildbühne* usually guardedly praised the films and the centerist *Der Film* opted for mixed aesthetic reviews, leaving the right-wing *Der Kinomatograph* to warn against communist propaganda. As early as March 1927, the Hugenberg-owned *Kinomatograph* noted:

"... the great hope placed in the Russian films has been fulfilled only partially. Besides, there seems little reason to support direct or indirect Soviet propaganda ..." [\[13\]](#)

The ultra-right-wing *Germania* went even further, describing MOTHER KRAUSE'S STRIP TO HEAVEN as an amalgamation of "whores, criminality, food and drinking orgies, communist demonstrations" and "dirt in the name of art." [\[14\]](#)

Finally, by mid-1929 the Prometheus was taking a much more rigid stance in regard to the production of popular films, i.e.. only films with a clearly Marxist tendency were supported. The Prometheus's more stringent propaganda efforts surely had their roots in rising unemployment, the economic depression, and the KPD's conviction that the Social Democrats, in alliance with the bourgeois status quo, were attempting to wipe out Germany's radical left. First, the Red Front Fighters League, a coalition of KPD and leftwing SPD, was forbidden. Then, in the first days of May 1929, the SPD police chief of Berlin, Zörgiebel, slapped a ban on all demonstrations. On May 1, 1929, the police opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, before barricades could be erected in Berlin's "red" Wedding district. A ban on the KPD seemed imminent, although it was not until Hitler seized power that the KPD was outlawed. In this situation of intense class struggle, clearly defined ideological lines had to be drawn.

HUNGER IN WALDENBURG (1929, Piel Jützi), a feature documentary on living conditions among the starving miners of lower Silesia, was released early in 1929. The film was financed by the Popular Association for Film Art (1928), a leftist coalition dedicated to "people's cinema." Besides offering "culturally valuable films for little money," the Association published a magazine, *Film und Folk*. [\[15\]](#) Its board of directors included Heinrich Mann, Käthe Kollwitz, Erwin Piscator, Bela Balazs, and G.W. Pabst. Its production efforts through the Weltfilm included a documentary on a German workers delegation in the Soviet Union, CLEAR ACROSS RUSSIA (1928, Arthur Holitscher), and compilation of Soviet newsreels, IN THE SHADOW OF MACHINES (1929). The Association's most ambitious project, HUNGER IN WALDENBURG, developed out of WIR-connected activities: profits were earmarked for miners' families in Waldenburg, one of Germany's most economically depressed areas.

Although the film from Leo Lania's script suffered major censorship cuts, it still exposed capitalist exploitation in its most brutal forms. Using nonprofessional actors, the film's montage intertwined documentary scenes with the fictional story of a young unemployed miner: Part I: living conditions among the miners; Part II: capitalist bankers and Junker landowners — a young worker moves into the district; Part III: a class-conscious worker introduces the worker to a miner's widow after inducing him to return some stolen goods; Part IV: dark, dingy apartments — a man hangs himself, a landlord demands rent; Part V: unable to pay, the widow faces eviction — in an ensuing

fight between the landlord and the worker, the young man is killed. [16]

The film's force was undoubtedly diluted by the reactionary censors, who cut all details of wages, mine owners' profits, and exploitive rents. Yet the film documented the alliance of bankers, Junkers, and police. [17] That more militant winds were blowing in the KPD press was indicated by Willi Bredel's attack on the SPD in his favorable review of WALDENBERG:

"[The film] indicts a Social Democracy which protects, rebuilds, and maintains this murderous capitalism against the revolutionary proletariat." [18]

*The Red Flag*, on the other hand, complained that "the workers' existence is sentimentalized and misuses their naturalness for theatrical effect." [19] Yet they also concurred that Jützi had managed to visualize the totally inhuman living conditions brought about by capitalist repression and exploitation. The mixture of documentary footage and a dramatic situation resulted in a new and effective filmic form.

This fictional-documentary node could be traced back to a parallel development in Piscator's radical theater. In "Despite All" (1925), a documentary stage revue of the years 1914 to 1918, Piscator and John Heartfield interpolated newsreels into the staged-historical scenes:

"The whole performance was a single montage of authentic speeches, essays, clippings, manifestos, photos, and films on war, the revolution, and historical persons." [20]

Two years later, Piscator/Heartfield staged Ernst Toller's revue. "Hurrah, We're Alive." Here the dialectic montage of visual elements within the frame of Heartfield's photomontages found their three-dimensional correlative in Piscator's revolutionary conception of theatrical space. Piscator's dramas, on the other hand, displayed documentary films behind the actors to comment on the action. Thus, "Rasputin" (1927) included a documentary montage directed by Hübler-Kahla (a Prometheus member), while George Grosz fashioned an animated film for "Schweik."

Like Eisenstein, whose "A Wise Man" predates Piscator's work, Piscator and the Prometheus were attempting to formulate a basic Marxist aesthetic grounded in the dialectic synthesis of historical reality and fiction, objective historical reality, and the potential for a socialist construction of that reality. Through the juxtaposition of elements, the audience approached a dialectic synthesis. Such an aesthetic placed heavy intellectual demands on the audience, and the inherent difficulties were never quite resolved.

The Prometheus, however, continued to experiment, albeit on a more limited scale. Jützi's short, *THE DEATH MINE* (1930), inserted staged footage of the hazardous work in the mine, to frame the scenes of an actual funeral of 102 miners killed in Neurode. Since the owners refused

to let the film crew in the mine, the mining accident was restaged for the camera. The film ended with an endless coal train and a montage of miners at work, illustrating that despite accidents and death, the capitalist machine rolls on.

HOW THE BERLIN WORKER LIVES (1930, Slatan Dűdow) documented living conditions in the Wedding district of Berlin, where overcrowding, rat-infested alleys, and damp, ancient buildings bred tuberculosis and disease. Dűdow compiled documentary and fictional footage in a narrative similar to HUNGER IN WALEDNBURG. Again a working-class family was evicted from their miniscule flat. The father struggles but is arrested as the fat landlord stands by laughing. Through the juxtaposition of images, the crass division between classes was emphasized: proletariat and bourgeoisie, slums and villas, a fat landlord feeding his dog steak and a poor working-class family eating a meager soup. In fact, only a few shots suggested a narrative: a letter of eviction, a family scene with two sick children and a blind grandfather, the father being brutally beaten by the police, and, finally, furniture piled in a trash bin. The nameless workers played themselves and were thus elevated to symbols of their class's struggle. The film ended with the title, "Such is not a life," and was promptly banned by the already predictable censors.

Surprisingly, HOW THE BERLIN WORKER LIVES, like DEATH MINE, only made spare use of titles since these were most likely to come under the censor's scrutiny. The remaining titles were relatively innocuous or ironic, relying for their effect on montage, e.g., "Our Baltic Spa" followed by a shot of children swimming in a fountain. The connections between ruling bureaucratic structures and the bourgeoisie were even more concretely defined: while the police brutally beat a worker, shots of a laughing landlord were intercut. The film ended with a close-up pan around a police helmet, ending with an extreme close-up of the helmet's Prussian eagle as a symbol of the ruling class's autocratic rule. Significantly, the Prussian police helmet appeared frequently in close-ups in Hochbaum's proletarian film, BROTHERS. As a visual answer to the authority of the Prussian eagle, proletarian films often utilized a close-up of a working man's clenched fist, although that particular code went as far back as Griffith.

Another code which appeared repeatedly in HUNGER IN WALDENBERG, as well as in MOTHER KRAUSE and BROTHERS, signified the dire straights of the proletariat by showing a person counting his last pennies at the kitchen table. In both FEW THE BERLIN WORKER LIVES and THE DEATH MINE, shots of unemployed workers were followed by montages of unemployment booklets piling up in government bureaus. Again, the faces pushing the paper in these offices were never seen, only the facades: the system remains impersonal and insensitive to the needs of the proletariat. These shorts, then, attempted to present within a documentary framework the cause-and-effect relations between the suffering of the working classes and capitalism's economic and political structures. Admittedly, the visual codes were extremely simple and rather tentative.

These codes were, however, re-enforced through repetition in both fictional and documentary modes. Thus, *HOW THE BERLIN WORKER LIVES* included a shot of mother Krause in the pawnshop, reprising the images and themes in *MOTHER KRAUSE'S TRIP TO HAPPINESS* (1929).

This most successful film of the Prometheus film collective will be analyzed in Part 2.

## Notes

- [1.](#) *Catalogue: Konzentrationslager Dachau, 1933-1945* (Brussels: Comité International de Dachau, 1965), p. 24.
- [2.](#) Sets designed by John Heartfield. See Ludwig Hoffmann, *Deutsches Arbeiter Theater 1918-1933*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1973), p. 5.
- [3.](#) Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1967), p. 177. This source, though factually correct, must be treated carefully, as Arthur Koestler's supportive forward might indicate.
- [4.](#) Willi Münzenberg, *Propaganda als Waffe, Schriften 1919-1940* (Frankfurt/Main: März Verlag, 1967), p. 169.
- [5.](#) Clara Zetkin, quoted in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung 1918-1932*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1975). p. 55.
- [6.](#) Erwin Piscator, *Theater der Auseinandersetzung* (Frankfurt/Main: Edition Suhrkamp, 1977). p. 43.
- [7.](#) Jerzy Toeplitz, *Geschichte des Films, 1895-1928* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1975). p. 443.
- [8.](#) Jay Leyda reports in *Kino* that the Soviet authorities only took note of *POTENKIN* after its Berlin success, where a score by Edmund Meisel was added. *Kino* (New York: Collier Books, 1973), p. 200.
- [9.](#) I haven't seen this film. See *Proletarische Filme in Deutschland vor 1933* (Munich: UNIDOC brochure), p. 21.
- [10.](#) *Der Kinematograph*, November 13, 1927.
- [11.](#) *Jahrhuch der Filmindustrie 1929 (Film Industry Almanac)*. I haven't been able to identify the American shorts, produced by Educational Films Corporation, New York, except by their German release titles.
- [12.](#) Babette Gross's description on this point is unclear but it seems that the Soviets were not willing to directly fund the Prometheus's film productions.
- [13.](#) *Der Kinematograph*, March 6, 1927.
- [14.](#) Michael Hamisch, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* — dialog

(Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1976), p. 161.

[15.](#) See Bert Hogenkamp, "Workers' Film in Europe," *Jump Cut* No. 19 (December 1978).

[16.](#) H. P. Manz, *Der Realismus, 50 Jahre Deutscher Film* (Zurich: Kunstgewerbemuseum, 1966).

[17.](#) I've just seen an apparently reedited version of the film, which was distributed in England by Atlas Film. The film opens with a view of a Silesian castle (Junkers), then cuts to a poverty-stricken weaver working in the local cottage industry before his son (Holmes Zimmermann, the only professional actor) announces his intention to try his luck in the coalfields. A montage of working conditions in the pit follows. The young man, destitute and unable to find work, steals a smoked fish. A worker observing the theft persuades him to return it and introduces him to a young widow who takes him in. A montage of overcrowded conditions in the tenements is preceded by the man's timid attempt to sleep with her, which doesn't work out because her three children sleep in the same room. Various workers' families count their pennies to pay the rent. During a fight with the rent collector, the young man is killed. As he falls down the stairs to his death, a rapid montage reviews the main points of the film. (Werner Hochbaum's film of the Hamburg dockworkers' strike of 1896, *BROTHER* [1929] employed the same effect.)

[18.](#) Willi Bredel, quoted in *Film und Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 2, p. 86.

[19.](#) Alfred Durus. *Die Rote Fahne*, March 17, 1929. Also quoted in *Film und Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 82.

[20.](#) "Erwin Piscator, *Das politische Theater* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1963), p. 72. Also quoted in Eckhard Siepmann, *Montage: John Heartfield* (Berlin-West; Elefanten Press, 1977).

### Iranian documentary

by Hamid Naficy

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#### **BACKGROUND: A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF IRAN**

In order to understand the political and social climate in which cinema in general and documentary film in particular had to survive, we must look back and review briefly Iranian history from the late nineteenth century to the present.

The seven shahs of the Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from 1796 to 1925. The Pahlavi dynasty which followed reigned until it was overthrown by a popular revolution in 1979, at which time the Islamic Republic of Iran was created.

From the nineteenth century onward, the independence of Iran depended upon the delicate balancing of the forces of the two imperial and imperialist Western powers, Russia and Britain. In fact, we can attribute the relative independence of Iran during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, compared with those of most other countries of Asia and Africa, to this balance of power. [1] The fear of total war discouraged military entanglement and provided the setting for a peaceful economic rivalry between these two great powers. The Russian and British entrepreneurs as well as their respective governments gained exclusive and lucrative concessions to organize military units, build railways and roads, work the mines, construct irrigation canals and other agricultural and industrial enterprises, and establish national banks. These and other concessions, which in effect mortgaged the country's future economic development, indicated the increasing manipulation of feudal Iran by Russian and British pressures. The Iranian ruling class and royalty for the most part tended to take advantage of the big power rivalry to pay for their own extravagance and corruption and to prolong their stay in power.

But, from 1890 onward, the time for quiet or muffled acceptance of these actions had passed. A new element, an aroused public, upset the balance. This new element emerged in 1890 after Naser ed-Din Shah conceded to a British entrepreneur a complete monopoly over the

production and sale within the country and the export of all Iranian tobacco. Massive protests, first led by the *ulama* (religious leaders), resulted in a nationwide boycott of tobacco. The sense of nationalism and the outrage against the shah's policy was so widespread that even the women in his own harem participated in the boycott, eventually causing the government to cancel the concession. The shah himself, six years after he had granted the concession, was assassinated by a nationalist.

This public awakening brought together three segments of the Iranian population who have ever since then participated in the major opposition movements: the clerics, the merchants, and the intelligentsia. These groups, incensed by the continuing granting of monopolies to foreigners and the desperate economic conditions of the country, once again arose in protest in 1905 in what is known as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and demanded an end to foreign loans and concessions, the initiation of social and political reforms, and the limitation of the power of the court. Muzaffar ed-Din Shah procrastinated until he was on his deathbed in 1907, when he finally signed the new constitution into law.

That same year, as dark clouds of the First World War were drifting closer, Britain and Russia, fearful of imperial Germany, signed an entente which divided Iran into spheres of influence, an agreement about which the Iranians were neither consulted nor informed. Meanwhile, Mohammad Ali, a cruel and despotic man, had replaced his father on the throne and, aided by Russia and Britain, worked to thwart the revolution. Eventually, despite the fact that he was forced into permanent exile by public opposition (leaving behind his twelve-year-old son, Ahmad, as successor), the pressure brought to bear by British politics and Russian troops helped bring the constitutional revolution of Iran to an end in 1911.

During WW1, Iranian neutrality was violated when Russian and British troops occupied the northern and southern parts of the country. Ahmad Shah was nominally in power, but the Russians and the British effectively ruled the country. The war brought widespread devastation and famine to Iran, but it also rekindled the nationalist movements.

In 1921 Reza Khan (the father of the shah) was brought to power with assistance from the British, who were anxious to see "law and order" restored to the country. Reza Khan established a centralized modern army and began to reform the financial system of the country under the guidance of U.S. expertise. In 1925 he officially deposed the Qajars and enthroned himself, the first shah of the Pahlavi dynasty. From 1925 to 1941 he endeavored to Westernize Iran rapidly and forcibly. "Education, industry, transportation, communications, and the army were greatly improved." [2] Industrialization and Westernization assumed top priority and agriculture assumed a secondary importance. It is worth noting, however, that his agricultural policies strengthened the landlords and impoverished the peasants, and he himself amassed a

great wealth and became by far the largest landlord in the country.

Many traditional and religious beliefs and institutions were forcibly squelched or outlawed. Confident of the support of his army, he began disregarding and trampling the constitution and the institutions it had envisaged; the legislative, the judiciary, political parties, unions, and the free press. In 1941 Reza Shah was forced to abdicate by the Allies, who feared his German sympathies and who were seeking to establish a supply line to Russia. His son, the twenty-two year-old Mohammad Reza, was placed on the throne. Soon after, the young king enlisted the services of the U.S. advisors to reorganize the Iranian army and gendarmerie as well as to combat the Soviet-supported autonomous republics of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

However, the public dissatisfaction and the disruption caused by war, foreign interference, and the dictatorial regimes, of the Pahlavis had created a socially volatile environment. The fuse that finally set off this social time bomb was the dispute over the role of the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil company (AIOC) in Iran. In the 1950 election, the nationalization of AIOC became a central issue on the strength of which Mohammad Mossadeq later became prime minister. As a result of the election and his loss of popular support, the shah fled the country. When Mossadeq nationalized the company, the major Western oil companies, supported by the British and American governments, instituted a worldwide boycott of Iranian oil, discouraging such potential customers as Italy and Japan. Mossadeq's pleas to the Eisenhower administration for loans or assistance were ignored. Instead, the U.S. government and the CIA (with assistance from the British and the Iranian reactionaries) moved to reinstate the shah in August 1953. Kim Roosevelt, the grandson of the U.S. president, and Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, formerly of the FBI, were the main operatives in the 1953 coup. Immediately after the coup, the U.S. offered \$45 million in emergency aid to the shah. Thereafter the U.S. aid, military support, and loans continued to consolidate the position of the dictator, making way for the launching of full-scale capitalist development.

In 1957 the U.S., which had now replaced both Britain and Russia as the main foreign power in Iran, helped establish and (with Israeli aid) train the manpower for the shah's national secret police, SAVAK, which institutionalized the policy of summary liquidation of dissidents, progressives, and leftists. The increasing revenues from oil and U.S. assistance gave the regime a new lease on life. The shah, urged by President Kennedy, initiated his most sweeping reforms under the grandiose title of the "White Revolution." [\[3\]](#) The most important features of this program were land reform and enfranchisement of women. However, there were serious discontents due to his heavy-handed approach, along with economic crisis, the opposition of some of the *ulama* to the reforms, public fear, and mistrust of both a total royal dictatorship and of capitulation to Western powers (especially the United States, from whom the shah had accepted a new and unpopular Status of Forces agreement). These all contributed to an *ulama*-led

uprising against the shah in 1963. After three bloody days, the army regained control, leaving a reported 5,000 persons dead. [4]

From this date onward, in order to pave the way for his brand of forced and bogus industrialization and Westernization, the shah moved to suppress all political, social, and artistic activity, earning for Iran, according to Amnesty International, the dubious credit of having the "worst record of human rights." [5] As far as national economy was concerned, agriculture was forgotten and a compradore and ersatz form of industrialization was encouraged. Corruption and graft prevailed. One of the largest items of expenditure in the annual budget was that of the security forces and armed forces. The near \$20 billion military procurement from the U.S. in the 1970s helped the U.S. economy, but it also placed a megalomaniacal dictator in command of "the most extensive armoury of weapons outside America, Russia and Europe." [6] The shah's own personal assets have never been revealed, but the assets of his Pahlavi Foundation alone are estimated to be around \$3 billion. [7]

Inevitably, high inflation (approximately 30%), along with many of the other ills and oppressive measures already mentioned, created an extensively eroded social and economic terrain ripe for the final confrontation between the shah and the Iranian people. This confrontation contained at its core an explicit ultimatum to the foreign powers, and most particularly to the U.S., who had meddled in Iranian affairs for decades. It is in this light that the recent events and anti-U.S. government sentiments in Iran should be viewed. Peaceful sporadic demonstrations in various parts of the country in 1977 led to more direct action in 1978. Strikes in key industries (e.g., oil) and businesses (e.g., bazaars) crippled the economy and the machinery of the state. Open armed struggle developed and defection in the ranks of the armed forces proceeded at a high pace. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had been exiled to Turkey and then to Iraq in 1964 and 1965, now took up residence in a village near Paris, where he gained the attention of world news media.

In this new uprising, once again the coalition of the clergy, bazaaries, secular intellectuals, and the leftists was at the center of events, although the revolution had become a mass, nationwide affair in which people from all walks of life and classes participated. For various economic, political, and strategic reasons, the massive protest by the public was united under the banner held by Ayatollah Khomeini, and it finally achieved its immediate goal when on 16 January 1979 the shah left the country.

### **Notes to political history**

1. Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), p. 158.

2. Ibid., p. 20.

3. Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979).
  4. Ahmad Faroughi, "The Internal Opposition against the Shah and Foreign Domination," in *Iran Erupts*, ed. Ali Reza Nobari (Stanford: The Iran-America Documentation Group, 19), p. 72.
  5. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, vol. 1: *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), p. 6.
  6. Anthony Sampson, *The Arms Bazaar, from Lebanon to Lockheed* (New York: Bantam, 1978), p. 275.
  7. Chomsky and Herman.
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## IRANIAN DOCUMENTARY

The Iranian cinema dates back to the origins of cinema itself, yet it suffers from a lack of understanding and appreciation since most of the early films and filmmakers disappeared and died before any systematic research was conducted. In examining the history of Iranian nonfiction film, it may be helpful to delineate three major periods: Infancy (1900-1937). The Rise and Fall (1938-1974), and From the Ashes (1975-1980).

### INFANCY (1900-1937)

Cinema in Iran, as elsewhere, began with simple documentaries of everyday events produced by interested entrepreneurial individuals. However, unlike their U.S. counterparts, the Iranian filmmakers were immediately patronized by the royalty and upper classes. They took up filmmaking at the royalty's behest and on their behalf.

Mazaffared-Din Shah, the fifth shah of the Zajar dynasty, visited Paris in 1900 and viewed, for the first time, the newsreel films of Africa and Asia. Impressed, he ordered the court photographer, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akasbashi, to purchase some film equipment. On August 18, 1900, the first Iranian film was made in Ostend, Belgium. It documents the "feast of flowers" in which women in carriages parade past the shah throwing flowers. Back in Iran, Ebrahim Khan filmed religious ceremonies, royal events, and the palace zoo, setting the tone of much of the documentary footage which would follow in years to come. These early films were shown at the houses of dignitaries and at the royal palace during marriage, birth, and circumcision ceremonies.

Ebrahim Khan Sahafbashi, a progressive antique dealer and technology aficionado, was the first semi-independent nationalist filmmaker. He purchased an Edison Kinetoscope projector and some films in Europe in 1900. He screened these films in the backyard of his antique shop until 1905, when he converted the shop into the country's first movie theater. Although patronized mainly by the royalty and upper classes,

Sahafbashi was no royalist. He pursued his cinematic efforts during the constitutional revolution of 1905-1911 and was outspoken about the backwardness of the country and the corruption and cruelty of the Qajar rule. He advocated constitutional government and joined one of the revolutionary societies which had cropped up across the country. Due to his antiroyalist politics, religious opposition to cinema in general, and severe financial problems, Sahafbashi soon was exiled from the country and his property confiscated.

In 1980 Mehdy Russi Khan, a Russian national, began showing films in the harem of Mohammad Ali Shah and later in a public theater in Tehran. He mostly showed French comedies starring Max Linder and Prince Rigadin but also made some films himself. He shot an 80 meter newsreel of the mourning ceremonies of Meharram, which was processed in Russia but never shown in Iran, perhaps due to religious opposition. Although Russi Khan's royalist politics and his cinema involvement were condemned by the clergy, he was able to continue due to Russian and royal support. During the constitutional revolution, his theater was a center of conflict between the opposing factions. One night the Persian Cossack Brigade (Russian-officered supporters of the shah) would come to see films, and another night the revolutionaries would take over the theater to see them.

During the constitutional revolution, the public ransacked his theater, destroying all his equipment and films. This may have been prompted by his foreign birth or by religious opposition to cinema, but his royalist politics alone would have been sufficient cause for the public's reaction against him. In 1911 he followed his mentor, Mohammad Ali Shah, into a permanent exile in Paris.

A few years later, engineering student Khan Baba Mo'tazedi began working part-time in the Gaumont film factory in Paris. Upon Mo'tazedi's graduation, the factory director gave him some 35mm film and equipment and he returned to Tehran. Like other Iranian filmmakers, Mo'tazedi produced documentaries and newsreels along with some family "home movies." In 1925 Mo'tazedi filmed THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY and on 24 Azar 1304 (1926) he shot the twenty-minute film REZA SHAH'S CORONATION. It is said that the noise of Mo'tazedi's camera was the only sound breaking the silence and decorum of the occasion. [\[1\]](#) He made other newsreels of the monarch presiding over opening ceremonies for many industrial developments and portions of these became part of the first "film piece" produced to accompany the national anthem. This anthem piece was shown before each film screening in every theater — a practice abandoned only in the late 1960s. Mo'tazedi's newsreels were shown in the army compounds as well as in the theaters.

When sound arrived, Iranian theaters were still showing foreign-produced newsreels by Paramount, Metro, Movietone, UFA, and Pathe. One which played widely in 1932 was filmed in Turkey, showing Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Foroughi conferring with Kemal Ataturk

and Foroughi delivering a brief speech in Persian. This was apparently the first Persian language film exhibited in Iran and it provoked astonishment. Most Iranian viewers had distrusted the foreign sound films, thinking that the tricky theater owners had hired people to utter unintelligible noises behind the movie screens. With Foroughi's speech, they were suddenly plunged into the sound era. The enthusiasm created by this film encouraged the theater owner to screen the first Persian language feature, *THE LOR GIRL* (1934), produced in India by Iranian filmmaker Abdol Hosain Sepanta.

The production of indigenous documentaries and features in this period was meager and Tehran's eight theaters mainly showed foreign films. Despite the increasing number of theaters, social and political conditions militated against the growth of a real film industry. The majority of the population was illiterate and couldn't read the intertitles while religious taboos against the cinema thwarted audience growth and professional participation. These taboos especially excluded Moslem (and 11 other) women.

Worries increased about film's negative cultural and social effects. In 1930 a reviewer noted that censorship was being used in other countries and advocated a ban on films showing lovemaking, criminality, Western fashion and makeup, and political or religious propaganda. [2] Islamic publications blamed novels, films, records, and plays (all unwelcome westernizations) for the moral corruption of youth and women. One such publication described and condemned the effects of sentimental melodramatic film in the following manner:

"When that lust-seeking capricious man and that nubile young girl sit side-by-side in front of the movie screen and view the nude men and women embracing and taking long warm kisses from each others' mouths, will not the fire of lust inflame in them, preparing the grounds for all sorts of moral corruption which will burn up the harvest of their lives? Yes, it will burn, burn like fire burning dry thistle." [3]

From the beginning film production fell under the auspices of the central government and documentaries were limited to the recording of royal events and the like. Filmmakers thus became completely subservient to the whims of the ruling powers. Later on, cinema would be used as a weapon to undermine the customs, religion, and culture of Iran.

#### THE RISE AND FALL (1938-1974)

In the first decade of this important period, the local film industry suffered tremendously due to World War II. Locally, many significant political changes were occurring — notably the abdication of Reza Shah and his replacement by his son, Mohammad Reza. Under the new shah, the condition of the film and television industries — these two major instruments of image manipulation — improved gradually. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, an active but short-lived internationally known

Iranian cinema (The New Wave) emerged.

The newsreels of the early part of this period continued to concentrate on royal events, although some exceptions did emerge. There were films such as a ski film made in 1945 and films like *SIGHS OF TEHRAN* and *ROYAL PALACES* were also exhibited in 1948.

At this time the Iranian military turned to film for propaganda purposes. Army cinematographer Colonial Khaliqi filmed many military and official functions including the funeral ceremonies for Reza Shah.

Iranian and imported newsreels were shown before features in theaters throughout the 1930s, most notably the British Movietone and a German newsreel. The German newsreel, featuring Persian narration, was the most popular. Exhibition of this newsreel was stopped in 1941 when the Allies invaded Iran. After the war it was replaced by the American *NEWS OF THE DAY*, also with Persian narration. Because it was difficult to obtain local footage, these newsreels all mainly consisted of European events in which Iranians were in some way involved.

During the Cold War the US government perceived that "... our system of government and our way of life have come under direct and deadly challenge by an implacable, crafty, and, of late, openly contemptuous enemy of both." It responded with a "containment policy" which included "influencing the minds of men, in political, scientific, and moral fields." [\[5\]](#)

In Iran, film represented the most effective instrument for "influencing the minds" of a largely illiterate public. Accordingly, the United States Information Service (USIS) — with the aid of the Iranian government — distributed Persian language United States Information Agency (USIA) films to villages and towns via forty mobile film units. The USIS soon undertook to make films better suited to the Iranian audience, and they hired Syracuse University to recruit an U.S. team to produce films in Iran. This team produced eighty-eight films and thirty-eight filmstrips on such topics as Iranian geography, nutrition, sanitation, and agriculture. In 1954 the USIS also inaugurated the first newsreel produced in Iran on a regular basis. Four hundred and three issues of *IRAN NEWS* were released before 1964, when it ceased to operate.

The Syracuse team helped create an audio-visual production center at the Fine Arts Administration (later known as the Ministry of Culture and Art: MCA) which included 16mm and 35mm production facilities, editing studios, and laboratories. Eighty Iranians were trained in various aspects of production while thousands of others received in-service training as well. A number of the production personnel trained at the center are still actively producing commercial features.

Between the 1959 departure of the U.S. technicians and 1965, the center produced fifteen to twenty-five documentaries yearly. Most of these were propaganda pieces shown in Iran but also exported via Iranian embassies abroad.

In 1959 the center began the biweekly NEWS modeled after its U.S. counterpart IRAN NEWS. Like the earlier newsreels, its "news" consisted mainly of the shah's activities and other official (and US governmental) functions in Iran. Only much later did the center produce any noteworthy documentaries and these will be discussed shortly.

Thus the Cold War policy of "containing" communism benefited Iran by creating its first fully equipped film organization. Unfortunately, however, its films generally whitewashed U.S. society, government, and technology, and they strengthened the position of the shah. Furthermore, the production and distribution of documentaries remained in the hands of the government, which employed film as propaganda for the shah.

Television was also introduced in Iran at this time with the assistance of U.S. commercial interests. In 1958 Iraj Sabet, a Bahai businessman whose family represented Pepsi Cola and RCA in Iran, launched Television of Iran — based on the U.S. model of commercial TV. The U.S. media conglomerates had a clear influence on the development of this nascent industry in Iran, since the equipment and training were supplied by RCA, while the programming was largely NBC series and MGM films. In 1966 the government took over Television of Iran, creating National Iranian Radio and Television, a government broadcasting monopoly. Although NIRT produced many documentaries, its productions were again mainly propaganda pieces, and we will discuss only the exceptions.

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a blossoming of cinema activity throughout Iran. Filmmaking programs were started at Tehran University and the Cinema and Television College, and a nationwide network of amateur filmmakers called *Einema-ye Azad* (Free Cinema) was formed. Film clubs at universities, cultural centers, museums, and even foreign embassies began exhibiting Iranian features and documentaries.

Although the PICA and NIRT continued to be the main sponsors of documentaries, private and semi-governmental organizations gradually began to sponsor films promoting their own activities as well. These films, moreover, were less blatantly propagandistic and mediocre than the typical MCA or NIRT production. They can be categorized as institutional, fine arts, ethnographic, and social documentaries.

## INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTARIES

The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), formed upon nationalization of the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, employed film systematically, producing many films on oil and petrochemical subjects. It also made films depicting Iran's progress and modernization, highlighting the role of the shah and NIOC in that direction. Under its auspices, Ebrahim Golestan directed *A FIRE* (1961), a highly visual treatment of a seventy-day oil well fire in the Khuzestan region of southwestern Iran. This film

was edited by prominent Iranian poetess Forough Farrokhzad and won two awards at the Venice Film Festival in 1961. A year later they followed with *WATER AND FIRE*, a short, lyrical film about the fire station in the Abadan refinery. Farrokhzad's dynamic editing made these films more than simple reportage of ordinary events and processes.

In 1966 Golestan produced the heralded *WAVE, CORAL AND ROCK* with a \$280,000 NIOC budget. The film begins by showing the calm, colorful beauty of underwater life near Khark Island in the Persian Gulf, where an oil terminal for ocean-going tankers was to be constructed. Soon the camera surfaces and reveals a desolate island where the ancient calm of a lone shepherd is suddenly broken by the arrival of a helicopter on a survey mission. From here on, the film methodically depicts the process of connecting the Khuzestan oil wells to the island by huge oil pipes. The film concentrates on the step-by-step process, infusing itself with a sense of the magic and inevitability of the technological transformation of Iran. The narration is often verbose and gratuitous, but, technically, the film is relatively well assembled.

Working with the Society for Assistance to Lepers, Forough Farrokhzad directed *THE HOME IS DARK* (1961), a poetic and humane film shot in twelve days at the leper colony near Tabriz. The film eloquently and lyrically portrays the people of the colony, expressing their joy and humanity in their daily lives.

"Ugliness has no physical basis. Lepers and leper colonies are not ugly. If you view lepers as people you will soon detect beauty in them. When a leper mother nurses her child or sings lullabies to her, how could you call that ugly?" [\[6\]](#)

It also depicts the misery and tedium of their existence; in one scene, she focuses on a man pacing in a barren autumnal yard, counting the days of the week with each step. The film uses irony well. Children read a popular prayer thanking God for the beauties and health bestowed on them while the camera cruelly pans across mutilated faces, hands, and feet. Asked to use the word "home" in a sentence, a student first writes "home" and after a moment of hesitation adds "is dark."

Farrokhzad draws an analogy between the leper colony and Iranian society, a point not lost on the Iranian public, which rose up briefly in the early sixties to fight the malaise and corruption of the shah's regime. For its part, the government felt that Farrokhzad had presented a false and unnecessarily cruel picture and suppressed the film. It has been shown at festivals abroad, including the 1974 Chicago Film Festival, but has never been released to the Iranian general public. In its place, the government released its own version, called *THE HOME IS BRIGHT* (1973).

## FINE ARTS DOCUMENTARIES

The MCA sponsored many documentaries about Iran's history and its

arts and crafts. Mostafa Farzaneh, using a French crew, directed three such films: PERSIAN MINIATURES (1958), a detailed look at this traditional art form; CYRUS THE GREAT (1961), concerning the surviving artifacts of the famous king; and WOMAN AND ANIMAL (1962), a filmic catalog of the "7000 Years of Art in Iran" exhibit held in Paris.

Fereydoun Rahnema, a gifted poet and writer, studied film in Paris before producing PERSEPOLIS (1961). This lyrical black-and-white film — a landmark for its sensitivity and honesty — was made with simple equipment and little funding. An Iranian reviewer in Paris jubilantly proclaimed,

"Finally, someone has discovered the principal veins of the original and untouched mine of Iranian cinema and has struck the first blow." [\[7\]](#)

The film uses shots of the remains of this ancient palace to illustrate the palace's successive eras of prosperity, conflict, and destruction. Short cuts of hooves, faces, hands, and spears — set against Persian music and sound effects — recreate the sense of war and conflict. In the end, the viewer sees the once proud monolithic monuments scattered in ruin, soaked in rain. Rahnema transcends objective reality to portray subjective perspectives. He laments the destruction of Persepolis, but he takes the viewer one step further, seeking life and regeneration in a closing sequence of cleaning rain and singing birds.

Iranian filmmakers made many other films depicting the historic arts, and many of these won awards at international film festivals. Most of these were glorifications of Iran's past, intended for foreign audiences and rarely shown to the general public at home. Examples include: Manuchehr Tayyab's CERAMICS (1964), Ebrahim Golestan's HILLS OF MARLIK (1964), and Houshang Shafti's CARPET (1974) and THE BROKEN COLUMN (1966), which is too similar to and less successful than Rahnema's PERSEPOLIS. Manuchehr Tayyab continued throughout the seventies with a series of films dealing with historical architecture while other filmmakers trained their lenses on such subjects as the myriad folk dances of the country.

(Continued on [page 2](#))

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Iranian documentary, page 2 by Hamid Naficy

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### ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARIES

Many films have been devoted to the ceremonies of the Moslem religion, especially those of the dominant Shiit sect. These range from depictions of the pilgrimage to Mecca to examinations of the coexistence of different religions in Iran.

Naser Taqva'i, who had previously directed shorts documenting life on the fringes of society in Tehran, was sponsored by NIRT to direct two important ethnographic films — *THE JINNI'S WIND* (1970) and *ARBA'IN* (1971) — both filmed in cities of the Persian Gulf coast.

In *JINNI'S WIND*, Taqv'a focuses his attention on a possession ceremony where individuals possessed by the "evil wind" are undergoing exorcism. The film opens on shots of waves, the seashore, and the ruins of the town, with the raspy voice of Iran's foremost poet, Ahmad Shamlou, describing the origins of the wind. He tells how the wind was brought to the shores of Iran by African slaves, decimating the population and leaving portions of the town in ruins. The actual possession sequence shows a group of men and women sitting on the floor, beating drums and chanting. The possessed wear white cloths over their heads and bodies and move entranced to the rhythm of the music until the spirit is exorcised, leaving them calm and cleansed. The ceremony takes place in strict privacy, and Taqua'i was admitted only because of his close ties to the region, its customs, and its people.

Arba'in is a ceremony marking the fortieth day of the martyrdom of Imam Hosain. Devout Moslems mourn the occasion by donning black cloth and forming mass processions whose male members engage in chanting, breast beating, and self-flagellation to the rhythm of drums. Attain shows the preparation for mourning, the procession, and the final ceremony in which the group moves kaleidoscopically to the rhythm of a chanting leader. The film skillfully conveys the frenzied tension of the occasion. Shots of farmers and fishermen are interspersed throughout the film, because Taqua'i sees the origin of some of the Arba'in ceremonies in the daily rhythms of life in the region:

"Often, the sound of breast beating reminds me of rowing."

[8]

Another noted NIRT filmmaker, Parviz Kimiavi, directed *O' DEAR SAVIOR* (1971), about the pilgrimage to the grave of Imam Reza. The film accentuates the grandeur of the sanctuary, the intricate gleaming mosaics of mirror and colored tiles, and the huge crystal chandeliers. The pilgrims are heard pleading with the imam for help and generosity. Their poverty and humility are devastatingly juxtaposed against the wealth and grandeur of the structure housing the grave. The film goes on to present the pilgrims and their rites in more detail. Uncanny realism and intimacy is achieved by using a hidden camera, and Kimiavi provides an indelible impression of the pilgrimage.

NIRT cinematographer Manuchehr Tabari filmed a ceremony of a Sufi sect in the Kurdistan. The result is a shocking black-and-white short called *A FEW MOMENTS WITH THE QADERI DERVISHES* (1973). Men play special drums, sing mantras, and roll their heads. Soon some of them rise to dance with their whole bodies as the tempo increases. The camera roams among the dancers, zooming back and forth with the intense rhythm. One man turns toward the camera, pops a three-inch rock into his mouth, and swallows. Another chews a handful of razor blades, and a third chews off and eats the head of live snake. A fourth man drinks kerosene from a lamp, and a fifth bites a mouthful of glass from the lamp chimney itself. An old man impales himself with twelve-inch skewers, driving them through his earlobes, cheeks, lips, neck, and belly. Absolute frenzy rules. Finally, one of the participants comes forward as if to swallow the lens of the camera and the screen goes black. Unfortunately, Tabari fails to explain the profound political and socioreligious roots of these ceremonies.

Anthropologist Nader Afshar Nadert and NIRT filmmaker Gholam Hosain Taheridoust each made films called *ACORN* (1966 and 1973, respectively). Both were made in the Zagreb mountains, where more than half of the tribal population of 300,000 is migratory.

Naderi's film centers on the preparation of bread from acorns but also details the routines of the nomads' daily life. Although it is interesting and complete ethnographically, it fails as a filmic whole. The scenes follow one another like bits in a patchwork quilt.

Taheridoust, on the other hand, focused on a single family's preparation of the acorns. In contrast to Naderi's year-long production, this film was shot in two days of meticulous recreation by the family. Shooting was preceded by an extensive period of preproduction and research during which Taheridoust gained the trust and knowledge of his subjects. His film is more cohesively cinematic than Naderi's although as a documentation of a way of life, Naderi's is more comprehensive.

In *DESERT CARAVANS* (1974), Kambiz Derambakhsh follows a camel caravan across the sand deserts. Through the timeless silence of the desert, the camels carry such incongruent goods as a clock and a

transistor radio. The travelers pray at midday, battle sandstorms, reach (or imagine) a waterfall, and finally arrive at their destination. The film contains some evocative images of the vanishing camel caravans but is devoid of social commentary on their significance and decline.

## SOCIAL DOCUMENTARIES

From the mid-1960s on, Iranians made a number of socially conscious documentaries. They may have responded to the brief uprising of 1963 and its economic and political roots — roots which were compounded as the regime became more excessive in its control of all facets of life. However, these films suffered from censorship and lack of public exhibition, and their makers had to make do with a marginal existence.

Kamran Shirdel directed several MCA-sponsored films which have rarely been shown to general audiences: *WOMEN'S PRISON* (1965); *THE CASTLE* (1966), about prostitution in Tehran; and *THE NIGHT IT RAINED* (1967).

*THE NIGHT IT RAINED* presents several people's reactions to a newspaper story about a teenage boy who kept a train from reaching a section of track washed out by rains. Shirdel skillfully juxtaposes contradictory interviews with numerous people involved in the event. The viewer is faced with a bewildering range of accounts of what was done by whom and when. A salient comment on reality and perception, this film was banned for years before winning the 1974 Tehran International Film Festival as best short film.

A number of critical films were made about institutions, but these, too, received very limited exposure. Khosrow Sina'i's *BEYOND THE BARRIER OF SOUND* (1968), about a school for the deaf and mute, and Reza Allameh Zadeh's *THE ETERNAL NIGHT* (1972) are two examples. Mohammad Hosain Mohini Hasanabadi also made *WORK CAMP* (1974) about a government work camp. The film was shot under supervision but includes clandestine footage. It explores the deplorable conditions of the camp's poor, old, and crippled inhabitants. A man who was severely burned due to unsafe conditions gives a defiant political analysis of the work situation as well as eloquent testimony to the resilience of the human spirit.

Along with this new — but effectively silenced — documentary voice, Iranian audiences also witnessed the emergence of the "New Wave" features. The feverish creativity in the feature film industry faded rapidly, however, due to the 30% rate of inflation, systematic censorship, repression, and police terror. Alameh Zadeh, for example, was convicted of attempting to assassinate Queen Farah. New Wave features were further hurt by unfair competition with both foreign and Iranian government productions and the development of distribution monopolies within the domestic private sector.

Throughout this middle period of Iranian cinema, then, indigenous documentary production flourished. These films were almost all

sponsored by government or semi-government agencies, however, and this sponsorship was by no means free of political interference. Documentarists were subject to a more incessant and direct form of censorship than their counterparts in the feature industry. This censorship at all stages of production limited the subject matter and its presentation. Thus most nonfiction films concerned themselves with the past glories of Iran, the traditional arts and crafts, the new institutions, and the modernization and westernization policies of the government. Few films dealt genuinely with significant social, cultural, or political issues. Most attempts to address such issues were limited to a simple expository report on the issues or events involved. Only rarely did they delve into the causes or offer suggestions for the amelioration of the situation.

In addition, distribution was handled by the sponsoring agencies, so they could withhold distribution of completed films they disliked. Since documentaries were not customarily shown in theaters, NIRT became the primary channel of exhibition. And although NIRT officially adopted a liberal stance toward artistic expression, it only broadcast films which substantiated the regime's political line.

#### FROM THE ASHES (1975-1980)

The year 1975 was the fiftieth anniversary of the Pahlavi dynasty. The government celebrated the grand occasion by coercing all kinds of agencies and businesses to produce films heralding the tremendous progress achieved under the Pahlavis. The NIRT networks reflected this situation in their broadcast schedules. Not a week passed in which one such film was not broadcast. Documentaries celebrated the royalty, the armed forces, women's rights, tribal resettlement, the oil and steel industries, and much more. Iran's limited filmmaking resources were strained by this unprecedented volume of work, creating inflationary rise in the cost of all film services and wares.

Early on in this period, films continued to offer the same clichéd approach to traditionally acceptable subjects such as the historic arts and architecture and native ceremonies. Also, a few films were made in the tradition of impressionistic realism, such as Abbas Baqerian and Reza Gharavi's *THE BAZAAR WEEPS* (1976). In it they lament the death of a bazaar — the traditional lifeline of Iranian commerce. And Kyumarse Deram Bakhsh, with NIRT support, directed *THE WORLD IS MY HOME* (1978), about Nima Jushij, a pioneer of Iran's New Poetry movement.

During the feverish revolutionary period which began in late 1978, however, all official film production ceased, and in its place an encouraging alternative emerged. Feature and documentary filmmakers alike began to use their craft to document the daily life and events in Iran. Freed from censorship and organized repression and fired by revolutionary ardor, film groups reminiscent of the "film committees" of the Russian revolution were formed. Hundreds of hours of film were shot with equipment and material "liberated" from the various agencies

and processed inside and outside of the country. After the shah's departure and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in early 1979, much of this footage was compiled and broadcast via the television networks.

FREEDOM (1979) — shot in super8 and blown up to 16mm — was broadcast in Iran and has played at several universities in the U.S.. While this fifty-minute film provides no background or analysis of the revolution, it offers the raw sounds and images from the point of view of the Moslem factions involved. Slogans, chants, and songs are well integrated into the film. Unfortunately, the image is often rambling and out of focus while the soundtrack contains many unfinished sentences. Yet despite the sermon-like narration the film has a spontaneous "you-are-there" quality for those not present during the last weeks of the revolution.

Several other films employing revolutionary footage have been made and shown in this country. BLOODY FRIDAY (1979) was made by UCLA students Rafigh Pooya and Marsha Goodman as a thesis project. The title refers to the confrontation between demonstrators and troops in Jaleh Square on Friday, September 8, 1978, in which the film reports 3,500 people were killed. Unfortunately, it doesn't live up to its goal of analyzing "the historic, economic, and social antecedents of the revolution in Iran," though it does expose the political oppression under the shah. [9] It is largely devoted to the history of the Pahlavi regime since the 1953 CIA coup, the role of the U.S. government in sustaining the shah, and the bias of the U.S. news media during the revolution. The film gives superficial "newsreel" coverage of this history, avoiding a much-warranted analysis of the economic and social forces within the country.

IRAN IN THE THROES OF REVOLUTION (1979), produced through the Iranian Students Association, is much more successful. This two-hour film analyzes the roots of the shah's power and the economic, social, and cultural foundations of the popular, anti-imperialist uprising. In one powerful sequence, the pomp of the shah's visit to Washington, D.C., is juxtaposed with the war-zone atmosphere of the melee that ensued when the anti-shah demonstrators clashed with the police. Tear gas fumes drift across the White House lawn where President Carter and Walter Mondale are conducting a welcoming reception for the tearful shah and empress.

The film ends with a fast-paced montage accompanied only by music. Street clashes between troops and unarmed civilians gradually build into an armed struggle by the masses. This is followed by the sad face of the departing shah, a brief picture of the overwhelmed interim prime minister, Shahpour Bakhtiar, and the triumphant arrival of Ayattollah Khomeini in Tehran. It is an emotional montage celebrating the popular insurrection against a previously unquestioned dictator. Unfortunately, it almost totally ignores the role of the clergy and Islam in mobilizing the masses and bringing the revolution to fruition.

Another organization, the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS, a leftist pro-Khomeini group), produced the one-hour film *FLAMES OF FREEDOM* (1979), which takes a longer view of history. It dates the origin of Western imperialism in Iran back to the Portuguese occupation of the Persian Gulf island, Hormuz, in the early 1500s. With historic photographs and film clips, it also recounts the rise of modern nationalism in Iran from the tobacco boycott of the 1870s to the revolution of 1979, paying tribute to many revolutionary movements and leaders. In attempting a systematic study of Iranian anti-imperialism, the film fails to analyze the roots of the 1979 uprising. Nonetheless, this film includes many sequences analyzing the contribution of the leftist student forces abroad, their role in discrediting the shah overseas, and in fighting his regime within Iran. The film emphasizes the organizational goals and activities of the confederation, thereby providing an appropriate vehicle for training CIS's own cadre members as well as informing a general audience.

A very different film is Mahmoud Doroudian's M.A. thesis at UCLA, *BLOOD WILL TRIUMPH OVER THE SWORD* (1979). This film reveals the deep devotion of its maker to Islam and its contribution to the Iranian revolution of 1979. Its title quotes the Ayatollah Khomeini. Sensitively, poetically, and without narration, it involves the audience in the collective emotions, sights, and sounds that swept the country during the revolution. The juxtaposition of contrasting and contradictory elements add force and drama to the information presented. Its opening economically, humorously, and devastatingly illustrates the shah's subservience to the U.S. government, as we see the grandiose coronation of the shah, during which he, like Napoleon, crowns himself. Meanwhile the sound track bursts forth with a rousing version of the U.S. national anthem.

*TILL REVOLUTION* (1980) is another thesis film by a UCLA film student, Mohammad Tehrani. In this two-hour, English language documentary feature, Tehrani attempts to present an impartial view of Iranian history from the Pahlavi rule to the post-revolutionary period. Using film footage shot by himself, by NIRT cameramen, and by American and British sources, he builds an analysis of the economic, social, and political mismanagement and crimes of the Pahlavi regime. The revolutionary events of 1978-1979 are sometimes ponderously and at times graphically depicted while important historic film sequences add value to the film.

The film attempts to pay tribute to the various revolutionary groups who participated in the uprising, something that many of those in power in Iran are loath to do at this time. However, these sequences are brief and seem like afterthoughts, robbing the film of visual and historical continuity. In addition, although the filmmaker is not supportive of the Islamic regime and points out some of its errors in judgment and policy (for example, vis-à-vis the Kurds), his criticism remains minimal and superficial. As the film wears on, Tehrani points out the importance of the solidarity which enabled the coalition of the clergy, the bazzaris, the

leftists, and the secular intellectuals to bring an end to the Pahlavi regime. The film ends with a plea for unity as the only means powerful enough to guarantee the salvation of the Iranian revolutionary process.

The relative impartiality of Tehrani is a breath of fresh air in the cacophony of frenzied partisanship that is rife in present-day Iran. However, this very strength has made his film a conservative, lengthy hodgepodge, lacking a well-defined point of view and the dramatic force that is necessary to sustain a two-hour film.

All the films discussed thus far have been shown in the U.S. at universities, at meetings and conferences of radical political groups, at film festivals, and even in a public theater in California. However, none have been shown on U.S. television except *IRAN: INSIDE THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC* (1980), which was shown by PBS in June 1980. This English language feature documentary, supported by PBS, is the work of Bigan M. Saliari, a former film student at NYU. He and an American crew spent six months in Iran from December 1978 to May 1979 and filmed the final days of the uprising and the formation of the Islamic government.

The film is technically the most accomplished of all the films on the Iranian revolution discussed here. Sync sound, a fluid visual style, creative editing, and a well-thought-out film structure give this work continuity and the dramatic power that carries it successfully through its two-hour running time. Saliari's objective in this film is perhaps best voiced by the wife of one of the U.S. hostages being held in Iran, who, in the film's opening teaser, calls upon the U.S. to examine the history of Iranian-American relations from the time of the Pahlavis to the present, and by Saliari himself when he says, "The American people should have the right to hear all sides of the argument." [\[10\]](#)

In the main he is successful. In his attempt at countervailing the common misunderstanding and anti-Iran feelings rampant in the U.S., he provides a historical and analytical overview of Iranian history in this century and presents many lesser known facets of the U.S.-Iran relationship. In depicting the post-revolutionary times, numerous interviews with religious and political leaders, revolutionary guardsmen, members of revolutionary committees, and average people and peasants provide valuable data and insights to prevailing attitudes. By focusing periodically on a small village (Abgir) situated in northwestern Iran, Saliari manages to personalize the workings of Islam and communicate what the revolution has meant to the peasants without resorting to the bombastic narration now customary in such films.

The major flaw in the film is that it tends to validate the present Islamic regime at the cost of distorting facts. Saliari, who is apparently associated with CIS, [\[11\]](#) seems to consider the Iranian revolution to be both Islamic and complete — neither of which, strictly speaking, is true. In harmony with this view, he consistently ascribes the major role for the revolutionary activity in modern Iranian history to the clergy, only briefly acknowledging the contribution of the students, leftist groups,

workers, and secular intellectuals. True to its stated aim, this film does provide average American viewers an alternative to that which they receive through mainline media. However, Saliati's selective deletions and slanting of facts markedly limits the value of the film, a limitation which can only become more apparent with the passing of time.

An evaluation of the documentary film situation in post-revolutionary Iran is difficult and perhaps premature, but a few observations are possible.

In the first year of the Islamic Republic, NIRT was seen as a "public university" to be used to "reinforce our own cultural heritage as opposed to that of the West." [12] It broadcast hours of revolutionary footage as well as foreign documentaries and nature films. The British WORLD AT WAR series and Peter Davis's HEARTS AND MINDS were among many foreign programs shown. The networks came under heavy criticism as being too narrow in scope, too biased and subservient to a particular political and Islamic line, and too heavily censored. Documentarists objected to NIRT's frequent refusal to air their films and to the heavy censorship and editing of those shown. Even President Bani Sader in his first days in office criticized the network, stating that it should be a "mirror held before society to reflect all the events and all the news." [13]

This kind of censorship, combined with the disproportionate number of discussion shows, sermons, and speeches, resulted in a smaller television audience.

Movie theaters, on the other hand, became more crowded. In part, this was due to the fact that many theaters were destroyed during the revolution. It also reflects the fact that the government outlawed Western and non-Islamic entertainments such as night clubs and bars. But the politically enlightened and enthusiastic audiences saw many films which had been banned under the shah. These included Third World and political films such as Costa Gayras' Z and STATE OF SIEGE, Guzman's BATTLE OF CHILE, Pontecorvo's BATTLE OF ALGIERS, and others dealing with wars and revolutions. Islamic topics were also stressed with films such as Mostafa Akad's MOHAMMAD, THE MESSENGER.

Local feature film production was negligible but some documentaries were made about revolutionary topics. Many of these were "newsreelish," featuring unending shots of crowds and turmoil. Worth mentioning are THE NIGHT OF POWER (1979) by Mohammad Au Najafi, FALL OF 57 (1980) by Barbad Taheri, and A SHOWER OF BLOOD (1980) by Amir Qavidel. The latter is a reenactment about three soldiers who desert the shah's army and join the revolution. One of the soldiers died during the fighting but the other two survived to star in this film.

These films are shown in public theaters, film clubs, via television, and through a network of work brigades called the "reconstruction crusade."

In addition to their rural reconstruction projects, the "crusade" makes films of their activities and show selected features and documentaries to the villagers. Ironically, the mobile film unit distribution system, first used by the USIA and the shah, is now being used to combat the encroachment of westernization. It is providing alternative information while validating the daily struggle for nationhood.

The film and television industries, like everything else in Iran, are undergoing drastic changes. The enthusiastic reception given quality films, and the vocal criticism of poor television programs, indicate the emergence of a mature and healthy attitude toward the arts. There had been some indications of government interest in supporting the exhibition and production of quality films. The government announced that it would take control of the importation and production of quality films and would grant distribution rights to Iranian producers of high quality films. To encourage local production, a ratio would be established between the number of films produced and the number allowed to be imported. These policies contrast with those of the Pahlavi regime, which mainly encouraged the importation and production of cheap films devoid of ethnical consideration.

But the new policies are potentially double-edged swords. They can easily be subverted, misconstrued, and abused to control and stifle veracity and variety. The appointment of pro-Islamic individuals to manage the major national daily newspapers, the de facto takeover of a number of theaters by an Islamic branch of the government called the "Foundation for the Dispossessed," the total control of the broadcasting networks by Islamic hardliners, the shutting down of opposition papers, and the ransacking of opposition bookstores all indicate that the desire to establish and maintain a free flow of information has waned. In spite of this situation, given the heightened awareness of Iranian audiences and filmmakers and given the fluid political atmosphere, one hopes that such misuses will not be tolerated for long. The time has come for Iranian filmmakers to take a stand and begin to explore the whole of Iranian life in all its nuances. The documentaries, needless to say, have a special responsibility and a pivotal role to fulfill in accomplishing this task.

## Notes

[1.](#) Mohamad Tahami Nejad, "Sinemay-e Mostanade Iran," *Tamasha*, no. 243 (6 Day, 1354 [1975]): 71.

[2.](#) Amir Jahed, *Salnameh-ye Rasmy-ye Mamlekai-e Pars* (Tehran: 1390 [1930]), pp. 164-66.

[3.](#) *Homayoon* 1, no. 1 (Qom: Mehr 1313 [1935]):25.

[4.](#) G. William Domhoff, *The Higher Circle: The Governing Class in America* (New York: Vantage, 1979), p. 252.

[5.](#) Ibid.

- [6.](#) Hamid Shoa'i, *Farhang-e Sinemay-e Iran* (Tehran: Herminco, 1354 [1975]), p. 577.
- [7.](#) Naser Movafaghian, "Takht-e Jamshid, na yek Hamaseh, na yek Marssiyeh," *Iran Abad* (10 Day, 1339 [1960]):25-26.
- [8.](#) M. Barari, "An Analysis of Naser Taqva'i's Works," a class term paper at Cinema and Television College, Tehran, 1975. p. 9.
- [9.](#) Quoted from the program notes of the Third World Film Festival, where the film was first shown, UCLA. April 1979.
- [10.](#) Howard Rosenberg, "The Tuesday Night Ritual," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 June 1980, part 6, p. 8.
- [11.](#) Hassan Zavaraee, "Misrepresenting the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, October 1980, p. 31.
- [12.](#) "Hamleh-ye Shadid-e Ghotbzadeh beh Radio BBC," *Kayhan*, no. 10713 (1 Khordad, 1358 [1979]):2.
- [13.](#) "Anva'e Sansur az Ruznameh-ha Bardashteh Mishavad," *Ettela'at* (8 Bahman, 1358 [28 January 1979]):12.

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### Women and pornography

by Julia Lesage

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Introduction: Special Section on Women and Pornography

With these articles on women and pornography, *Jump Cut* hopes to begin an ongoing analysis of pornographic film from a radical and feminist perspective. Little written on pornographic film takes into consideration both how images work and how pornography as an institution (economic, cultural, cinematic) specifically affects us. The topic has a social urgency that cannot be ignored. With the rise of cable television and video cassette rentals, pornography enters many homes. What impact does that have on adolescents' view of sexuality? (Do you imagine it's really kept out of their reach?) Furthermore, it has become a global issue, one of the most acute ways that capitalism's visual media have narrowly defined human sexuality and reached into the most intimate space of people's lives; every large city in the noncommunist world has its district where theaters show pornographic films from the U.S., Europe, and Japan. Even though mostly men go to those theaters, the reduced view of sexuality found in pornographic films affects women throughout the world.

In looking at the articles and books written on pornography (see Gina Marchetti's bibliography), we find a regrettable distance between works analyzing the history of the pornographic image, especially in the fine arts, which see the topic only in aesthetic or psychological parameters, and those protesting the abusiveness and the spread of the pornographic film and video industry. This latter group often does not analyze how images work and particularly how images are or can be related to fantasy. Image and sexual fantasy are interconnected with social and economic reality in a way that we must delineate more clearly if we are adequately to understand pornographic film and take any political action on it. These interconnections have not yet been traced out nor their functions defined by any one writer on either pornography or film. Articles that contribute to such an understanding are the ones we would like to see in *Jump Cut*.

Women may rarely have a chance or even the impulse to see pornographic film theatrically. A woman alone or a group of women together would feel, and probably actually be, physically threatened were they to attend commercial showings of such films, except on a college campus. The pornographic theater allows women as spectators only within the institution of woman-with-man, i.e., the heterosexual couple. To overcome this problem, several other women

in the Chicago area and I have studied pornographic film on video cassettes within the privacy of our homes. As we have done this, we have heard from other feminists that they too would like to know what such films look like and discuss them with other women. The same video cassette market that has provided the Saturday-night turn-on to many heterosexual partners also provides a protected way for interested women to look closely, perhaps for the first time, at such films and so provides an avenue for feminists from all disciplines to begin to analyze what such films contain. *Jump Cut* would clearly welcome more of such work.

We have to begin somewhere. I have read about pornography and seen about a dozen films but have no stomach to look at the explicitly violent ones showing the physical abuse of actresses. In my own thinking about pornography, I can get only as far as formulating the questions that face me when confronting the issues of the films' content and style and the industry as a whole. These are listed here in the hopes of refining the direction further discussions might take in *Jump Cut* on the topic of pornographic film.

## DEFINING PORNOGRAPHY

What is it? Sexual entertainment? Written and visual material specifically marketed and used for sexual arousal? Material that describes/represents explicit sexual behavior that is degrading (to women, to children) and endorses such behavior? Depiction of coercive, violent, or dominating sexual acts in a favorable way?

Almost all the images surrounding us have sexual connotations, and what feminists usually object to in pornography are nonsexual elements such as violence and domination. But still, pornographic images have as a specific purpose direct, sexual arousal of the spectator.

Is it a way out to distinguish pornography from erotica, the latter expressing personhood and mutual respect? Or does such a distinction depend too much on the receiver's individual taste (and class, race, and sex)?

What is degrading? If we are honest about what we, our friends, our lovers, children get off on, what do we find?

If women's erotica, such as Connie Beeson's film of two women making love, *HOLDING*, is shown in a package of erotic films, isn't the relation of the spectator, especially a male spectator, to such a film the same as to any pornographic film? Even to deal with defining the matter we need an understanding of contradiction, in the Marxist sense. [1]

What is the historical development of the present situation? What is the economic and social context of pornography's legitimization in the past 25 years? How was this change carried out through judicial decisions and through upping the ante in explicitness?

Pornographic films promise to show IT and lots of IT — that is, to show explicit sexual relations. But consider the IT that they show. Penises. Actors of both sexes frequently touching some but not other erogenous zones. Fucking. In the more violent films, a woman being hit in a way that you can see the red marks left on her body.

What is the difference in the IT depicted in heterosexual and gay male pornographic films? How would a women's pornography (yet to be made) depict IT?

The pacing, the predictability, and the narrowness of the IT seen in heterosexual pornography fascinatingly reveals much about ideological, hegemonic, male views of sexual relations. Because what I see is that the man comes and the woman doesn't — an adequate symbol for heterosexuality, especially as it is expressed in film.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Penises, labia, assholes, semen, and mouths in huge close-ups on the screen offer a direct and blunt encounter with the physical facts of sexual relations, but the films are abstractions, repetitive in form and very simple in their episodic style. The very directness and "dumbness" of the imagery surpasses metaphorical and symbolic interpretations on first viewing, but we must ask, what do all those images in their combination symbolically establish? In a sense, nudity is a costume.

What is the function of decor and various interiors — the depiction of private or not-so-private space? What is the function of money? Pornography originally meant "the depiction of whores," and even now women's sexuality is depicted in terms of pleasure and payment, not her work and ego management of the emotional scene.

How else is the depiction of women's sexuality limited? What's the significance of the adolescent woman as attractive and dumb? The middle-aged woman as the professional, the dominatrix, the phallic woman?

What images, what narrative constructions, what kind of pacing provide a sexual arousal for the predominantly male viewers? How does voyeurism function as an element within the films' narrative content, and how does it function in terms of the imagery presented to the spectator? When do we see conventionally romantic scenes? What "guarantees" are built in so the films are not too threatening? What vision of lesbians do these films perpetuate and why? [2]

## PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF PORNOGRAPHY

Who go to these movies? Researchers variously say upper middle class males, potential rapists, or working-class males. The medium presumably serves as capitalism's cheap, clean, industrialized form of prostitution. The films are regularly shown in prisons — with what rationale, to what effect? What do we know about the cable television and video cassette market, a market that has exploded all over the world? Who watches these films, and do they do with that visual and narrative material?

What do we know of the industry — pornographic filmmaking, financing, recruitment and use of actors, and distribution? What are the ties of the pornographic film industry to organized crime? How are these films distributed internationally? How did it get to be so profitable and where does the money go?

Why do we need this institution devoted to male sexuality? What do

pornographic theaters and bookstores mean to women's access to downtown areas at night? What demands do men make on women in the bedroom as result of having seen pornographic films?

## OTHER GENRES

Comparisons with male heterosexual pornographic film could usefully bring into the foreground issues that relate to all explicit depictions of sexual activity and issues particular to this genre. Worthy of study are gay male pornography, sexually explicit women's films, sex education films, and sexually explicit literature of all kinds.

How do gay male pornographic films differ from and resemble heterosexual pornography? How are the social relations in a gay porn theater unique? What are the historical links between gay porn and the development of a gay male ghetto? How is this related to gay male visibility and gay liberation (collective and individual)?

What kinds of women's erotic films do we have? How does the setting in which they are shown affect their reception? [3]

How does pornographic film function similarly to and different from pornographic literature, magazines, and photographs? How does advertising use pornographic conventions? How does art photography?

How are sex education films, used in sex therapy, medical schools, and social work, similar to and different from pornographic films? Are they intended only for scientific exposition and education or also as a turn-on so the students will be more empathetic with the sexual variant under consideration?

Would all cinematic depictions of heterosexual sexual relations in our culture reflect patriarchal ideology? Can gay or lesbian pornography escape? [4] What are our criteria for nondemeaning, nonexploitive, nonsexist films that present explicit sexuality?

## MALE SEXUAL ORGANIZATION

What does pornographic cinema reveal about the way that male sexuality is constituted? [5] To what degree is the need or desire to look — and to get directly aroused by looking — a learned male trait, one tied to men's visual possession of public space? What does it mean that many women have an angry or bemused response to the same visual images that turn men on?

If male gender identity is directly tied to sexual performance, pornography reflects that compulsiveness. In a driven way, the films express men's need to assuage threats against their power, their penises, their orgasmic capacity. In what ways do the content of pornographic films and the social use of the institution of pornography prop up male gender identity?

How does that compare to the way that women use visual and written material from the culture around them to express their sexual and emotional concerns? Their identity?

## VIOLENCE

What exactly is the sadism and violence found in pornographic films and how does it compare to the violence found in other films?

How is the image of women manipulated in the culture at large, and what is the relation of that to pornography? Is violence in the imagery the criterion for defining what is bad in pornography? What is the relation of violent imagery to violent fantasies?

What does it mean for men to have violent and transgressive fantasies about women and/or to see rapes depicted within a cinematic institution set up for their pleasure?

## LEARNING SEXUAL IMAGERY

What is the relation between individuals' capacity to create images and their psychological development from infancy on? The child is as "sexual" as the adult and creates her/his own sexual imagery and sexual "script." which are tied both to cultural determinants and to the individual's own history. How does pornographic film content reflect that?

Sex always expresses some aspect of interpersonal relations — love, hostility, anger, dependency, power, submission, identity, or affirmation of existence. To what extent would or could a nonsexist sexually explicit cinema draw on violent emotions and scenarios learned from childhood and part of the strong emotional response elicited by sexual encounters?

## WOMEN'S FANTASIES

In what ways are our fantasies related to our social values? Certainly there is no direct relation. Women have an extremely wide range of fantasies and not all women fantasize. Often our fantasies are our way of accommodating to a hostile world. Any turn-on is necessarily related to our feelings and imagination, and as Pat Califla writes, "To limit or expurgate the sources of our erotic imagination cramps and censors our erotic aspirations." [6] Women often feel ashamed because they have bondage or so-called masochistic fantasies. What are the connections between these fantasies and the fact of living in an oppressive culture, our very language being shaped by it? Women may use these fantasies to heighten sexual tension and as metaphors for abandonment to sexual pleasure, the pleasure of the fantasy residing in the woman's complete control over the scenario even as she imagines being compelled. The same images — ones of bondage, especially — mean very different things to men and women in the use made of them and in terms of real power differentials between men and women. As Ethel Spector Person, feminist analyst, puts it, the way gender training moulds sexuality, and "socialization into passivity or activity, subordination or autonomy, is decisive for the way sexuality (sensuality) is experienced and for the fantasies that attach to it." [7]

We must ask: what are the relations between men's sexual fantasies and men's power to express them, in this instance in pornography, and women's sexual fantasies and their use of the cultural material around them and their capacities or opportunities to discover what their own non-colonized sexuality might be?

In the women's press, a lively debate has been carried on by women active in attacking pornography and women defending the rights of sexual minorities. This argument deals with, among other issues, the politics of sexual fantasy and

the role that dominance and submission play or should play in women's lives.

## PORNOGRAPHY IN AN HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Sexuality seems such an intimate part of our identity it is often hard to see how historical contingency forms a substantial part of our sexual selves. [8] To what degree does pornographic film come from an historical process so that it seems "reasonable" culturally that such an institution exists? In a sense, as Michel Foucault points out, it proceeds logically from the nineteenth century's Romantic confessional literature and the Catholic Church's institution of the confessional itself — in both cases, to tell the truth meant to tell the tawdry secrets about one's sex life. [9] To what extent does the spread of pornographic film and video represent a "will to know" and to share with others a previously hidden seeming "truth"? To what extent does my own criticism fall within the same historical trajectory of seeking the truth through a discussion of sexuality? How is the feminist discussion of sexuality's political dimension different and why?

Foucault also describes a concomitant aspect of the contemporary interest and focus on sexuality — that since the nineteenth century, sex has been an extremely flexible ideological instrument manipulated, within relations of force, to achieve effects of domination. And he notes as the historical origins of this in the nineteenth century that children were sexualized, women made hysterics, perversions specified, and populations regulated. How does the contemporary spread of pornographic film serve as an instrument of social control, of ideological constraint, in the way that Foucault describes?

Sexuality, and especially pornographic film and video, is related to the notion of leisure (as opposed to work) and of recreation and entertainment.

In what way is the sexual and private self, who may see pornography and who may use pornographic materials for what seem to be very private fantasies, embedded in economic, class, and gender realities that shape sexuality? How does the bringing of explicit sexuality into the public sphere as an object of consumption change the public sphere?

## WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO PORNOGRAPHY

In a sense, this discussion of pornography is reactive. What would be an appropriate cinematic form for expressing women's sexuality? Can we imagine it? The women's movement has never opposed sexual freedom and honesty but has fought to expand and protect women's freedom to choose and to make demands in both the private and the public spheres. Women are making political demands within the personal sphere so as to expand our social notions about what a proper or satisfying sexuality might be.

Furthermore, many women do not take their identity or even major concern from the realm of sexual relations; they have many ways of enjoying sensuality. At the same time, all women receive pornographic visual material obliquely in advertising and in notions of "glamour." They live in a society, the ideology of which encourages violence against women. We must ask in what ways pornography controls and inhibits all women's sexuality and controls and inhibits their access to public space. Take Back the Night marches have been organized in many cities to demand safe public access to previously "unsafe" areas of the city, especially at night. They also redefine rape and wife beating

as "public," not private, crimes and proclaim the survivors of such crimes as women's heroes. In the past, however, survivors were expected not to talk about the abuse, to deal with it as a personal problem, which kept women from learning and uniting around issues of sexual abuse.

What remedies would we propose if we oppose some or all pornography? A liberal remedy is to create red-light districts in the center of the city — a bourgeois response. What kinds of pressures should be brought on legislators, mass media corporations, or individuals? What demands should feminists make on the left, on other feminists, about pornography? What demands can people make on each other, individually and collectively? What are the consequences, in the short term and in the long term, of the demands we make?

Notes:

1. For a discussion of the Marxist concept of contradiction as applied to feminist film criticism, see "Dialectical, Revolutionary, Feminist: Sara Gomez's ONE WAY OR ANOTHER," *Jump Cut* 20 (May 1979).

2. For an effective visual analysis of one photograph depicting lesbians, see Andrea Dworkin's "The Lesbian in Pornography: A Tribute to Male Power," *Sinister Wisdom* 15 (Fall 1980).

3. See Jacqueline Zita's article on the films of Barbara Hammer, "Counter Currencies of a Lesbian Iconography," *Jump Cut* 24/25 (March 1981).

4. Gregg Blackford, "Looking at Pornography: Erotica and the Socialist Morality," in *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation*, ed. Pam Mitchell (Boston: Alyson Publications. 1980).

5. For useful feminist studies comparing male and female sexual organization, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Ethel Spector Person, "Sexuality as the Mainstay of Identity: Psychoanalytic Perspectives," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980).

6. Pat Califia, *Sapphisty: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press; 1980), p. 1. A large controversy has arisen around appropriate feminist responses to pornography, with Califia taking a libertarian stance, arguing for the rights of sexual minorities. For a thorough overview of opposing views expressed at conferences, see the constant coverage of this topic in the feminist periodical, off Our Backs. Discussions of women's erotic imagination that take a different approach than Califia's are Melanie Kaye's "Sexual Power," *Sinister Wisdom* 15 (Fall 1980); and Andre Lourde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: William Morrow, 1980).

7. Person, p. 619.

8. See the Editor's Introduction to the *Radical History Review's* issue on sexuality in history (no. 20, Spring/Summer 1979) by Robert A. Padugug: "Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History."

9. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Originally the French title was *The Will to Know*. His book does not deal with the most general aspects of women's oppression as

have been explored within the women's movement.

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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Fantasies and nightmares The red-blooded media

by Valerie Miner

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copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1981, 2005

Her throat is exposed her toes are pointed. She is asking for it. She is enjoying it. A little pain never hurt anybody. There is a line through the middle of the picture. There is a knife in her belly. She is a doll, a pear tree, a piece of meat. She is a ridiculously proportioned, naked witch. She is tits; she is ass. She has pubic hair (sometimes). She is roped and raped. She is goggled and gagged. She is asking for it. She is enjoying it. She is mouth and vagina. Orifices that must be fed, perhaps stuffed. She has wide eyes, which do not see. She is dressed in red, the same shade as her blood. She is a nude mannequin in a downtown department store window, chained to a nude mannequin in the next window which is thrust upside-down into a washing-machine-for-sale. She is asking for it. She is enjoying it. She is bitch-mother-whore-virgin-prostitute-Playgirl-of-the-Month. She is the willing victim. She is Black and Blue from the Rolling Stones and she loves it. She is exposing her crotch to the bared teeth of a vicious dog. "She is young ... but not too young to be a 'slave of pleasure.'" She is everything you could want in a kinky, funky fantasy. She is asking for it. She is enjoying it.

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We rarely consider the daily dose of pornography we get in our red-blooded mass media. Recently many radicals have become uneasy with the proliferation of hardcore porn, but most of us remain unconscious of the amount of pornography in the popular media. The record-album covers feature battering or rape. The misogynist lyrics of Top 40 punk rock. The chic *Vogue* layouts, laced with exotic sadomasochism. The tasteless tidbits in feature films. The popular men's magazines that boast progressive politics as they surround their muckraking articles with photos of nude women in full-color gloss. Of course, we tell ourselves, we're not forced to look at the stuff. We can close our eyes, turn the page, walk out of the theatre. Once we start protesting pornography, we fear, we're threatening the First Amendment, which is precious to a radical forum. So we hesitate. We want to distinguish

pornography from the healthy pleasure of erotic art and the necessary explicitness of sex education. After all, we don't want to be Victorian, alarmist, or rhetorical.

It's a tricky Issue for the American mass media with its liberal pretensions. The game of "objectivity" demands two sides of the story. On one side, feminists claim that pornography is not only sexist, but brutal. Their broadening campaign links pornography with wife-beating, rape, incest, and child abuse. On the other side, beleaguered defenders of the First Amendment say that banning pornography would further erode the shaky ground of free speech. Reporters are already panicking about weak shield laws and heavy libel suits.

After spending months looking at pornography, reading academic-political-government papers on the subject, and arguing endlessly with friends, I cannot discuss the subject with even a pretense of dispassion.

I am still overwhelmed by questions: Why is our culture so tolerant of pornography? How much of that has to do with confused civil libertarian premises? Why do we scrutinize X-rated films for our children when violent sexism like *Hustler* magazine is available on corner newsstands? Why has the Left waffled so much on pornography?

Perhaps the biggest quandary is a good definition of pornography. We can turn to dictionaries and court transcripts, but no definition is all-inclusive and every definition can be misread or misused. Right-wing activists have labeled birth-control information as pornographic. A portion of the left says there is no such thing as pornography. Some of us give up and say, "We know it when we see it." For the purposes of this article, and this is my own definition, *Pornography is the representation of sexual images, often including ridicule and violence, which degrades human beings for the purpose of entertaining or selling products.* An important corollary is that *Pornography is more about the exercise of power than about the expression of sex.* This article will focus on the abuse of women's images although pornography ultimately exploits all people.

## THE PORNOGRAPHY INDUSTRY

Like everything else in the American mass media, pornography has its price. It is already a \$4 billion industry in the United States, according to the California Department of Justice. In San Francisco last year, pornography profits reached \$20 million. Los Angeles Police estimate that sales of pornographic movies have increased from \$15 million in 1969 to \$85 million in 1976. In New York, the porn shops in Times Square often gross \$10,000 a day. Across the country, child pornography is available in 260 different periodicals. Six of the 10 bestselling newsstand monthlies are "men's entertainment magazines." Hugh Hefner, personally, has created a \$150 million sexexploitation empire, which ranges from his "groundbreaking" *Playboy* magazine to movies, books, records, a syndicated TV show and dozens of Playboy Clubs all over the world.

The distinction between hardcore and softcore pornography is at best a temporary one. The Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography observed that

"by August 1970, the most explicit materials available 'above the counter' were approximately equivalent to the most explicit materials ever produced for covert sale. However, in all media and for all audiences, the degree of explicitness has greatly increased since 1960."

The soft-core porn of the mass media tends to numb public awareness and create a tolerance and/or appetite for more brutal forms of pornography.

### ACTING OUT THE FANTASIES

Pornography has increased in the mass media too quickly for many people to ask why. One clue to its popularity is the shock value. In this sensory-overloaded culture, we have developed a self-protective media numbness. Porn sells commodities and ideas. It gets our attention and keeps the product in our minds. Whether they're selling Noxzema on TV ("Take it off; take it all off ...") or deodorant in a magazine ("You'll love Tickle with its big, wide ball"), this shock can be very profitable.

Also, as Canadian writer Myrna Kostash has pointed out, pornography takes the responsibility — or mutuality — from sex. It commercializes individual pleasure. It reinforces our right to be separate, regardless of how that impinges on our need to connect. Pornography trains us as voyeurs to be satisfied in our alienation. It's hard to talk about "decadence" without sounding like Anita Bryant or Jim Jones. But I think that our society has tipped the balance between autonomous pleasure and a kind of self-destructive decadence. It has become much easier to consume pornography than to experience sex.

The increase of porn in mass media is also part of the backlash against feminism — along with the assault on abortion rights, the trashing of feminist presses, the packaging of the "Total Woman." Laura Lederer, coordinator of Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM), explained.

"Enough women have been rejecting the traditional role of subordination to men to cause a crisis in the collective male ego."

The women's movement, following the civil rights campaign, proved a devastating blow to the status quo. Also, feminism has surfaced at a time of declining economic and political stature. In the last decade, American men have lost job security, self-esteem, and have been confronted with massive guilt. They feel angry, threatened, impotent. Women are accessible targets. In the old days there used to be one in every kitchen.

We might be tempted to dismiss pornography as pathetic petulance, as

we ignore the impudent schoolboy drawing resentful caricatures of his teacher. However, pornography is both a form of assault itself, and an indirect permission to, larger violence.

The escalation of hardcore pornography and softcore mass media parallels a rise in physical abuse of women. The FBI reports that every 30 seconds a woman is raped in this country, and every 18 seconds a woman is battered. Police observe that rape is increasingly accompanied by whippings, beatings, or mutilation.

Countries that have liberalized their policies about pornography have documented large increases in the reports of rape and attempted rape. In Copenhagen during the first six years that pornography was freely available, the cases of proven rape rose from 150 to 218. In southern Australia, hardcore pornography was legalized in 1970. The rate of reported rapes has multiplied five times by 1976. Meanwhile, C.E. Walker in his 1970 study, "Erotic Stimuli and the Aggressive Sexual Offender," found that a significant minority (39%) of the sex offenders indicated that "pornography had something to do with their committing the sex offense they were convicted of." The Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography published his study.

Despite such evidence, the Commission dismissed any connections between pornography and violent crime. The 17 men and two women decided that none of the testimony was conclusive enough to warrant further regulation of the industry. In fact, its final report of 1970 called for the legalization of all soft- and hardcore pornography. The Commission's opinion was influential in shaping the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California* on June 21, 1973, which virtually gagged local anti-pornography laws. Since then, there has been a large decrease in the arrest and conviction of pornographers throughout the country.

The predominantly male bias of the Commission report is evident in its casual description of lesbianism as "obscene" and in its acceptance of stag films as "a familiar and firmly established part of the American scene." The Commission's conclusions are shaky on several points. First, the findings are severely outdated because of the escalation of pornography in the last nine years. Also, the studies used tested for aggressive behavior in very limited ways. Sadism, pederasty, and bestiality were excluded from the materials sampled despite their currency on the market.

It's hard to prove the connection between one pornographic photograph or one violent TV program and a growing climate of brutality. Usually, our attitudes and actions are stimulated by an accumulation of media images. One startling exception was NBC's 1974 drama, *BORN INNOCENT*, which showed a teenager being raped with a plumber's plunger. After the program was aired, three girls and a boy, aged nine to 15, raped a nine-year-old girl with a beer bottle in San Francisco. The eldest of the three girls admitted in a deposition that the rape scene in the television program had turned her on. Attorneys for the victim claim

that she suffered physical and emotional damage. They sued NBC for negligence. The case, which has been through several rounds in the last five years, is now in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

According to Beth Goldberg, an active member of WAVPM and WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women),

"We have learned how media violence fosters aggressive behavior in its viewers. This shows that media victimization of women increases the chances of all women being victimized."

Goldberg points to more than 50 studies involving 10,000 children which have demonstrated a consistent relationship between the amount of TV violence a child digests and the child's aggressiveness.

Another study conducted by the Commission was published by Michael J. Goldstein and four others in 1971. 55% of the rapists they interviewed indicated that they had used their victims to experiment with sex activities seen in pornography. Meanwhile, 77% of those who molested small girls got their impetus from pornography. Dr. Natalie Shainness, a psychoanalyst practicing in New York City, has observed that as rape becomes more common in the media, rapists stop seeing themselves as abnormal.

The Presidential Commission ignored not only the stimulus to violence from the audience, but the actual brutality against models in the industry. Rumors of "Snuff" films, showing the actual assault and murder of women for the screen, are neither the beginning nor the end of this exploitation. Models and actors who survive filming report broken bones from contorted poses and frequent beatings from photographers and moviemakers. One woman who worked as a model for three years told WAVPM that she was raped after one assignment. When she reported the rape to her agency, she was told the photographer was a "lady's man" and that they could not harass him over such a "little thing."

## RACISM AND SEXISM

The parallels between racist propaganda and pornography abound. Both racism and sexism thrive on the use of physical brutality and ridicule. The approach is often vengeance or humiliation. The object is to maintain or regain power. Racist propaganda has been considerably threatened since the 1952 Supreme Court decision in *Beauharnais v. Illinois*, which saw the defendant indicted for distributing pamphlets which portrayed blacks as a sexually craven influence on American cities. He was convicted of inciting violence by promoting literature negative to a minority.

Like racism, sexism flourishes in sarcastic asides, snide jokes, and caricatures. Humor is one of those covert corners of bigotry in the liberal consciousness. Some of the earliest cartoons — drawn in the late

1400s — were explicitly anti-Semitic. We have continued to endure stereotypes about avaricious Jews, sly Asians, and oversexed blacks — the last, long after the alleged demise of Jim Crow.

Racism is explicit in current pornography. Third World women and children are popular models here and in Europe. One reason is that they are particularly easy to exploit, often being economically desperate and naive about the pornographer's intentions.

Both "pretty porn" and hardcore films like **BLACK AND CHAINED** and **SLAVE GIRL** trade on the special sexual mystique of the non-white woman. Sabrina Sojourner, a black publicist, told me,

"Pornography often exaggerates the exoticism of Asian women and the allure of black women. We still retain some of the Victorian philosophy about preserving the virginity of white women. They're fair game. So pornography further objectifies people who are already objectified."

Pornography also serves racial self-hatred. The Ohio Players, a Black group, manage to tangle their anti-woman images with their racism. One of their album covers, "Pleasure," reveals a Black woman, with a shaved head (a sign of humiliation) being hanged by a chain. Their "Climax" album shows a Black woman making love on the front cover while on the flip side she is stabbing her man in the back.

Given all these intersections between racism and sexism, we shouldn't be surprised at the outrageous, often gratuitous, racism in the mass-circulation men's magazines. *Hustler's* October 1978 issue illustrates an article on the Kennedy-King assassinations with a grotesque layout of a black man (completely covered in black leather mask and clothes) raping a blond woman who is painted white. Their symbolic message about the violation of pure white justice by black power is not very subliminal.

## POLITICS AND PORNOGRAPHY

The power expressed in pornography is revealed in the political tension over the issue. Both the Right and the Left have righteously deplored pornography, while people of all political shades have manipulated it.

The traditional Right Wing objection comes from an opposition to sexual freedom — whether it is the right to choose an abortion or the prerogative of unmarried people to cohabit. The Right's opposition to pornography is not so much a protection of women as it is a defense of the family as a basic unit of capitalism. Fundamentalist belief assigns a woman's body to God, her husband and herself in that order.

The rationales for linking feminist protest with right-wing money and power are tempting. After all, pornography could be the issue that feminizes conservative women, much as the peace movement politicized many Catholics. Both the Catholic Church, with its Legion of Decency,

and the Mormons, through Brigham Young University Press, have manifested a consistent, considered opposition to pornography. However, the differences in final goals are too vast for a successful coalition. The feminist criticism of pornography is the exploitation of women's images. And the Right sees fit to include literature about abortion and contraception in their definition of pornography.

A socialist criticism might begin with the description of pornography as a sexist, racist, profiteering commodity. Pornography objectifies people, thereby exploiting the models, the purchasers and the society at large. Although porn pre-dates capitalism, mass porn is one of the great capitalist success stories. Marxists recognize that under late capitalism, pornography proliferates as a marketable object: The market expresses the "need." The need is met temporarily, only to stimulate and create larger needs. These needs create the values. Under capitalism, the only source of legitimate needs and values is the marketplace.

Ironically, the Left has often celebrated pornography as revolutionary. Pornography is associated with revolt and accepted as an aesthetic by radical men. This is very evident in the mass media of Eurocommunism. Italy's new wave of liberated television runs amateur striptease, blue movies and features like NUDE ON PARALLEL BARS. In both Spain and Portugal, the new regimes are reported and analyzed in macho Left periodicals rife with sexist illustrations. To a certain extent, this kind of sexual preoccupation is rationalized as a break with the censored patriarchal past. But it would take a real stretch of the imagination to applaud such Commie porn as a vindication of the banning of the *Three Marias*.

Here in the United States, pornography flourishes around the heavy-duty investigative journalism that some radicals define as "political work." These journalists claim that the only places brave enough (and rich enough) to print their potentially libelous muckraking are magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, which have a combined readership of twenty-nine million. Also, some journalists explain, *Playboy* and *Penthouse* give them access to a working class audience.

This last argument ignores the whole audience of working class women who don't usually read the skin magazines and who are often most victimized by them. Besides, we know from reading the advertisements, letters to the editor and other articles, that these popular magazines actually reach a large base of middle class men.

There's also the question of context. How credible is a corporate exposé placed between the left and right thigh? Finally, despite all our conceit about the value of journalism, how much of the audience bothers to turn from the pornographic pictures to the articles?

Clearly, freelance journalists are facing a crisis of survival. With one magazine folding after another, many muckrakers want to do assignments for a publication that's going to stay afloat long enough to print them. The pay rate of the skin magazines, between \$1,500 and

\$4,000 per article, is not, perhaps, incidental to the other arguments for publishing in them. The issue presents radical men and women with an agonizing examination of conscious. Some magazines, *Mother Jones* among them, receive crucial funding from the Playboy Foundation. It is not an easy issue.

Several years ago, before I had done any thinking on the subject, I submitted a short story to *Playboy*. Their rejection letter is one of the few I remember with gratitude. By now I'm convinced that men's entertainment magazines use progressive journalism as a front for their real business. Come the time for indictment against pornography, the radical journalist will be right there on the witness stand, drawling on about free speech. Although the crusading cowboy may think he's ripping off the system (by criticizing corporations in the capitalist media and getting paid several thousand bucks for it), it's pretty clear that he's the one who is being ripped off. His politics and his byline are being used to legitimize pornography.

Mass media porn is also a legacy of the sixties "sexual liberation," The Counter-Culture flaunted denim, drugs, socialism and fornication against the Establishment. According to Todd Gitlin, former President of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and now a professor of sociology at U.C. Berkeley,

"One of the problems with New Left politics in the 60s was that it was characterized by middle class radicals fighting for other people's interests. For politics to be successful, it must involve a certain amount of self-interest. Many student and ex-student radicals interpreted their self-interest as something they called sexual liberation — access to porn was part of that. But we've got to remember that people look for forms of escape that reproduce the oppressive structure. For instance, they watch commercial sports (which is run like work — with the same kind of stereotyped individualism and regulation). Pornography reproduces the oppressive domestic structure."

"Fuck" became a rallying cry. "Fuck Johnson!" "Fuck the War!" (Remember, "Girls say yes to boys who say no.") One of the most popular figures of sexy revolution was the irreverent *Realist* magazine. The editor, Paul Krassner, later went on to become editor of *Hustler*. On the Berkeley campus the Free Speech Movement of 1964 was preceded by the "struggle" to sell the scatological *Spider Magazine*. The right to peddle pornography was inexplicably and inextricably linked with the right to speak out against capitalism, racism and imperialism. Sexist was not yet part of the political vocabulary.

In the 70s, the confusion of pornography with liberation has been exacerbated by the human potential movement and its validation of personal expression as liberation. The crucial difference between sexist power and sexual expression is often overlooked. Throughout the 60s and the 70s, the New Left's attitude toward pornography, lacking in

personal sensitivity and theoretical base, reveals the extent to which sexism is still excluded from serious socialist analysis.

Todd Gitlin told me,

"The Left should always object to pandering like pornography. To the extent that pornography exploits real needs and creates models which debase human desire for decent existence, it is outrageous."

Gitlin suggested that we re-read a familiar passage from Marx, substituting "pornography" for "religion."

*"Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their conditions is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions."*

## MASS MEDIA IMAGES

The most familiar examples of mass media porn are in advertising — the focus on women's asses, the acrobatic spread of the model's legs, the mountainous regions of cleavage, all of which have no relation to the product. This type of "pretty porn" makes clever use of camera angle, lighting, color, and props. The subliminal messages start with the fragmentation of female bodies. Male rumps, for instance, are usually seen in relation to their full bodies, but women's asses are often the whole focus of an add for jeans or stockings. Sometimes the sexism or brutality is not so subtle. Max Factor's publicity for a moisturizer somehow turned into the threatening slogan, "A Pretty Face Isn't Safe in This City." In response to many letters of complaint from women, the company eventually eliminated the ad.

Pornography also seeps out into our programming and our editorial content. The obsession with flesh on CHARLIE'S ANGELS is a hackneyed complaint by now. As parental protest forces violence off the screen, there is a noted increase in sex on television, according to Caren Deming, assistant professor of broadcasting arts at San Francisco State University. She told me,

"In the mid-60s, violence reached a high point in TV and other media. Because of protests from groups like the PTA and the AMA, advertisers pulled intensely violent shows off prime time. They were replaced with sex. (This is natural. Our fantasy lives contain a great deal of sex and violence, as has been demonstrated by tests on dreams.) But TV sex is synthetic sex. It's partial undressing and close-ups. It's not erotic. It's plastic."

Clearly, the most explicit TV pornography comes on videotapes. In the San Francisco Bay area, the hottest-selling videocassettes are not cowboys or talk shows, but X-rated sex. Producer David Friedman bragged about the state of the videotape business to *Forbes* magazine last year:

"At least 10% of the people who buy tapes will want a collection of hardcore films for their libraries. It's an absolute natural for homes, for parties, when the boys come over for a beer. The man who buys a copy of PATTON may look at it one or two times, but the one who buys SEVEN INTO SNOWY is going to look at it 10-15 times."

The motion picture industry has survived numerous regulatory techniques. The movie mogul is forever shouting "art" while the cleric is denouncing "obscenity." If we could interrupt these two gentlemen, we might move beyond the flap about suggestive romances to the violent sexism on the screen. The loopholes in the rating system are cavernous. LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR, for instance, received an "R" rather than an "X" because the nude scenes focused on fragments of the woman's body. The Presidential Commission noted:

"The increased sexual content of movies not only has been dramatic but also has occurred in a very short period of time. The rapidity of change is exemplified by the treatment of the female body on the screen. In 1967, flashes of female genital exposure appeared in BLOW-UP, a general-release movie. Today, partial female nudity (breasts and buttocks) is very common, and full female nudity is becoming quite common in general-release pictures produced by major studios."

The distinction between general films and hardcore films is getting blurrier. *Penthouse* has recently invested \$15 million in a pornographic version of Gore Vidal's CALIGULA, starring John Gielgud and Malcolm McDowell. The reason for the movement to porn is financial. The Adult Film Association claims that in 1977 its 100 feature-length pornography films grossed \$3.5 million weekly — which matches one-tenth of the receipts from all other movies playing in the entire country.

So what are the lines between erotic art that is sexually oppressive and pornography? Audre Lorde, a black feminist poet, said in her essay, "The Uses of the Erotic:"

"The very word 'erotic' comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects — born of chaos and personifying creative power and harmony ... The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the European-American tradition, this need is ... almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away ... And this misnaming of the need and the deed gives rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity — the abuse of feeling."

The distinctions between pornography and erotica are uncomfortable, messy, and subjective. They waver around the issues of mutuality, power and coercion. Some absolutists declare that in eliminating pornography we will censor erotic art. But, as I said at the beginning of this piece, any definition of oppression is necessarily an exposure of moral conscience. The difficulty of making distinctions does not absolve us of our ability and responsibility to make them, especially when the lives of individual women and the sexual fabric of the culture are at stake. The real danger to erotic art is not the feminist protest of misogyny but the increase of pornography.

Last November, 3000 women and men marched through San Francisco's sleazy Broadway to "Take Back the Night." The next month, a similar protest against pornography and dangerous street conditions took place in Times Square. Meanwhile, across the country, women are experimenting with a series of consumer tactics — petitions, letter writing, re-zoning laws, picketing, boycotts, vandalism against porn shops, and class action suits. Taking the lead from other feminist campaigns, women are asking embarrassing questions of their male friends, making charges at public officials and generally fighting pornography as a political issue.

In Los Angeles, Women Against Violence Against Women was formed to protest brutal images on record album covers, such as the gang rape featured by Black Oak Arkansas. Another target was the Rolling Stones' Black and Blue billboard. Now a national group, WAVAW has organized a boycott of records from Warner, Electra and Atlantic. Although the boycott has by no means bankrupt the record firms, it has been successful in drawing national press coverage to record album pornography. In New York, the feminist protest ranges from legislative lobbying to vigilante window-breaking. In Cologne, Germany, a woman named Red Zora (after Zorro) has proclaimed herself "an avenger of the oppressed." She has raided sex shops of \$50,000 in goods, and the porn merchants have posted a \$1500 reward for her arrest. The protests are increasing among individuals and such groups as the National Organization for Women (NOW), Women for the Abolition of Pornography, Men Against Sexist Violence, and Women Against Pornography, a Manhattan-based group that grew out of WAVPM. The slogan of the anti-pornography movement is summed up on those little orange stickers that we are suddenly noticing everywhere: "Pornography Is a Crime Against Women."

#### SOLUTIONS: CENSORSHIP, ETHICS, EDUCATION

It is too easy to make the mistake of assuming allies by identifying mutual enemies. Liberals often think they're fighting repression by defending pornographers. In a great First Amendment flurry last year, 89 publishers, editors, and writers, including Woody Allen and Gore Vidal, took a large ad in the *New York Times* which compared Larry Flynt, the publisher of *Hustler*, with the Soviet dissidents. At such times, one is reminded that the American tradition of free speech is almost as

long as the tradition of violent genocide.

Censorship is an issue that divides even those who have worked side-by-side against pornography. The dangers of banning are frightening. Most journalists are born of an arrogance that turns to belligerence when any kind of restriction is introduced. Liberal consumers of the media who deplore pornography would die for its right to be printed, confusing in their tender consciences Stephen Daedalus with Chester the Molester. Likewise, many feminists are afraid that censorship laws could be turned right around against them.

Aside from censorship, the solutions to the explosion of pornography in the mass media include consumer remedies, vandalism, media self-regulation, and public education. The most effective solution would involve a combination of these.

Susan Brownmiller favors the banning of all pornography portraying rape, torture, murder, and bondage for sexual stimulation. She told me she isn't worried about the First Amendment because,

"It was never intended to cover pornography. The Constitution was written to defend freedom of political dissent."

She points to the already-accepted limitations on free speech regarding libel, slander, perjury, contempt of court, copyright violation, disrespect to commanding officers, plagiarism, yelling "fire" in a public auditorium and misleading advertising. Brownmiller prefers legal sanctions that can be shaped by public opinion to laws created in the courtroom on the personal persuasion, taste, or morality of an individual judge.

However, other feminists are more wary of the boundaries of legal protection. Camille Le Grand, an attorney active in the anti-rape and anti-battering movements, told me,

"All enforcement against pornography is political. As long as women hold such little power in this country, that's dangerous."

Le Grand claimed that there are enough laws on the books to restrict violent pornography, like regulations against obscenity and the sale of pornography to minors. She said that these laws can be better enforced.

Perhaps the biggest danger with the censorship debate is the way it draws a curtain on further discussion of pornography. Censorship would not control the waves of misogynist images in the mass media or the growth of a profitable black market. Before and after any censorship laws must come consumer activism and self-regulation within the media itself.

Within the mass media, editors are answering some challenges about their professional scruples. During the last couple of years, display ads

for sex films have been removed from the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Fresno Bee*, *San Diego Union*, *Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram* and the *Seattle Times*. These cuts were made despite the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars, one million a year in the case of the *L.A. Times*. In Sweden, feminists organized a protest against *Dagens Nyheter*, the largest daily paper in Stockholm. Women journalists successfully supported them in pressuring editors to eliminate pictures advertising sex shops and theatres. In Britain, the powerful National Union of Journalists has passed a code advising about the portrayal of women as subjects, workers, and images. Each of these measures has been limited in its scope and enforcement. The solutions are more tedious than censorship and — precisely because of their slow-hammering effect — more powerful than legislation.

The decline of pornography begins with public education. Consumer tactics and professional ethics only budge the stubborn lever of public consciousness. Just as we eventually encountered slavery and the Holocaust in the classroom, the brutality against women will surface there some day. The issue is already addressed at a few courses in journalism, women's studies, and sociology. However, much of the research is financially restricted or burdened with sexist prejudice. Schools and universities still require teachers and researchers to separate advocacy and academia. This separation has kept the discussion outside most classrooms so far. Of course, the real classroom in this country is the living room and the most effective teachers are the network television programs or the daily newspapers. The ultimate irony is that if Americans are going to be educated about the dangerous escalation of pornography in the mass media, they will have to be educated by thoughtful, honest coverage within the mass media.

## EVERYWOMAN'S NIGHTMARE

What may be one man's fantasy is every woman's nightmare. I'm finding it a terrible strain to write about pornography in a reasoned voice. I imagine that Zimbabweans would feel the same tension discussing Rhodes' theories of colonization, or that Jews would have the same problem with Nazi propaganda, so I would like to part from this rational exegesis to tell you a story about this story. This is what happened to me after a day of researching pornography, on one particular night:

I cannot sleep. Even after I have checked in all the closets and under the bed, locked the windows and each door twice, switched on the hallway light, placed the telephone by my bed, I cannot sleep. I do not feel safe. I check the can of Mace and my sound-alarm and my flashlight, but I cannot sleep. I try drinking — which is expensive and unhealthy, but it keeps my mind off Stinky, who has committed sixty (?) rapes. I fall asleep — or rather, I grow numb.

At 3 a.m. I awake to nausea and a headache and a slight sound of shuffling from the kitchen. I lie paralyzed for a moment. The sound is louder (closer?) this time. I move to the side of the bed and switch on the light, hoping to frighten the sound. I can still make it out the front

door. That's why, when I sleep alone, I wear a good flannel nightie. I will be dressed to run outside in the cold dark. Maybe all the way to the 7-11 Store where the speedy-dosey clerk, who is used to coping with nocturnal complaints, can phone the police for me. I can still make it to the door. I hear the sound again. Now I am angry. I get belligerent. I'll be damned if I'm driven out of my home as well as my sleep.

"George," I say, coaxingly, with just an edge of fear. "George," I say, pretending there is a large, strong George sleeping next to me in the bed. A "George" to frighten the rapist. But it doesn't work. There is the sound again. I am humiliated. I have had to enlist an imaginary defender and still the rapist has no caution. I am damned if he is going to win. I slip over the side of the bed and pick up the mace as I approach the front door. Quickly, I button the nightie. People have appeared at the 7-11 in worse. There's the sound again. Please, god, if I believe in you this once, will you let me out, let me go?

I am awake now. When I next hear the sound, it is not so frightening. This scene — which I have rehearsed so often in my half-awake states — is a farce after all. Now that I have broken through my hard-won sleep, I recognize the sound too well, as the sighing of my ancient water heater. I am alone again, vulnerable and sleepless.

I don't sleep because I am afraid. Afraid of being raped or beaten or mutilated or killed with a *Penthouse* stiletto or a *Hustler* meat-grinder. I am a single woman, living alone. This is my penance. Otherwise, I should be able to sleep. I am happy. I jog three miles in the mornings. I work hard all day. I am in love. I am, by most accounts, a fairly capable person. I have traveled around Africa alone, given lectures to large groups of people, driven my bicycle through daily rush hour traffic. But on nights like this, when I sleep alone, I do not sleep well.

No sense in wasting the night. I get dressed and head over to the 7-11 anyway. I'll buy some wine and some typewriter paper as alternate solutions. The street is dark and poorly lit, but I can see the bright fluorescence of the 7-11 Store from a block away. It seems a strange synthetic haven in the inhospitable night. The clerk looks more ready for sleep than I do. Ignoring him and the only other customer, I collect my sedatives. Then, as I approach the checkout counter, I see what I have been afraid to see.

The customer is leafing through a copy of a magazine. I don't notice the name. But I do notice the photograph of a woman — struggling against a chain around her breasts and through her mouth.

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Broken Blossoms— artful racism, artful rape

by Julia Lesage

from *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 26  
(December 1981)



The films and television programs I enjoy often have the brutal murder of a woman as a key plot element.

Sexist and racist films and television programs continue to engage us as viewers, we women of all classes and races. The mass media catch us up in their violence and sensuality. As a woman I must ask how the media can so seduce me that I enjoy, either as entertainment or as art, works that victimize women as one of their essential ingredients. Historically from the silent film era to the present, bourgeois film has developed various mechanisms for structuring in ambiguity and for keeping us emotionally involved. One of film's hallmarks as a "democratic" art form is its ability to allow for and co-opt an oppressed group's response. Feminist film criticism takes as its task exposing these ideological mechanisms and analyzing how they function both internal to a film and in a broader cultural and political context.

### Familiar sexual traits



Typage of the villain relies on a familiar, often exaggerated configuration of sexual traits.

Specifically, if we look closely at narrative films, with the intent of decolonizing our minds, we will find a similar "story" about sexual relations running below many films' surface. Over and over again, male and female film characters are assigned a popularly familiar configuration of sexual traits.[1][\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) This constellation of recognizable sexual traits provides mass art a way to express the culture's commonly held sexual fantasies. The way these fantasies are expressed varies, of course, from film to film, where they are manipulated and often displaced (e.g., in "doubles" or in Others) or condensed according to the exigencies of the plot and/or the social acceptability of directly expressing a given fantasy.[2]

Strikingly, the same kind of sexual-political "story," or assignation of sexual traits, is repeated from film to film, no matter how much the manifest content differs between films. This repetition is not ideologically neutral. Persistent configurations of assigned sexual traits, deriving perhaps most directly from 19th and 20th century literature, have a vitality in contemporary film because these patterns emerge from and serve to reinforce patriarchal social relations in the world outside the film.[3] Fictional sexuality parallels the real options that hegemonic male culture would like to keep on offering men and women today, and real power differentials between the sexes. In terms of the emotional options for both men and women that the cinematic configurations of sexual traits present and delimit, patterns of characterization are, in fact, usually oppressively perverse.

*Broken Blossoms*



Gish plays the waif in a film that treats girlhood in poverty in terms of victimization.



The Chinese man wanted to bring Buddhism to England.



He ended up in a London slum ...

In this context, that of durable yet perverse sexual-political structures in film, it is useful to look at one of the first films in the United States that was received as high art and as a progressive and emotionally moving statement against both masculine brutality and racial prejudice: D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*. The film was released in 1919 and was one of a number of poetic and intimate depictions of domestic life which followed Griffith's monumental epics of 1915-16, *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*.

*Birth of a Nation*, originally entitled *The Clansman*, had valorized the founding of the Ku Klux Klan, depicting it as a paternalistic, semi-feudal organization bringing order to a South suffering under the "chaos" of Reconstruction. Consequently, the film provoked a national scandal because of its racist content. Griffith's cinematic rejoinder to the charges against him, *Broken Blossoms*, deliberately tried to counter the then dominant racist ways of depicting Asians in popular literature, magazines, and film. In reaction to the importation of masses of Asian laborers and congruent with U.S. imperial ambitions in the Pacific, the United States had seen waves of anti-Oriental" prejudice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Newspapers sensationallly editorialized on and presented stories about the "yellow peril." Fictional narratives often used "inscrutable Orientals" as villains, or located vices such as drug addiction or white slavery in a U.S. Chinatown. In the decade before *Broken Blossoms*, films treated what seemed the most dangerous threat of all, "miscegenation." [4]

It is within this context that *Broken Blossoms* was perceived as a sensitive and humanitarian film. It daringly presented a chaste and ideally beautiful love between an immigrant Chinese man and a young white girl. The plot of the film was derived from Thomas Burke's short story, *The Chink and the Girl*, from his *Limehouse Nights*, tales of lumpen criminal life. Griffith changed Burke's Chinese protagonist from a schemer and "worthless drifter of an Oriental" to a poetic, peaceful Buddhist lover of beauty. [5] Ostensibly *Broken Blossoms* has a moral message: Asian Buddhist peacefulness is superior to Anglo-Saxon ignorance, brutality and strife.

Griffith embodies his moral message in his two male protagonists, a gentle Chinese storekeeper in London's Limehouse slum district, played by Richard Barthelmess, and a working-class brute there, Battling Burrows. Played by the large-framed, muscular actor Donald Crisp, Burrows prides himself on his masculine prowess. He is master both in the boxing ring and at home, where he bullies his housekeeper and daughter, the fifteen-year-old Lucy. Lucy, played by Lillian Gish, is a poverty-stricken, beaten child who awakens for one brief moment to emotional life before she is killed.

The plot of the film is simple. The film opens in a Chinese port city with Barthelmess in his ornate robes saying goodbye to his Buddhist mentor and then trying unsuccessfully to break up a fight between brawling U.S. sailors; the Chinese man is going to the West to bring a message of peace. The setting shifts to a London Limehouse slum, where we find out that the young Chinese man has become a lonely, disillusioned shopkeeper and opium addict.



... lonely, isolated, and ...



... lost in pipe dreams.



Burrows' fighting confirms his traditional masculinity, and also contributes to the plot, since he brutalizes his daughter.

Elsewhere in the slum, Battling Burrows sits in his shack reminiscing about a fight he has just won and is reprimanded by his manager for drinking and womanizing before his next fight.

Burrows' daughter Lucy is introduced, sitting huddled on a coil of rope on the wharf outside their house. (As Charles Affron points out in *Star Acting*, all the sets in this film are claustrophobic, even the outdoor ones. Departing from the epic scope of *Birth of a Nation*, *Broken Blossoms* formally accepts and uses the edge of the frame as limiting the scope of the action and incorporates many other boundaries such as walls, arches, and corners within the frame to enhance a claustrophobic effect.[6] Two sequences, indicating Lucy's reverie or perhaps moments recently experienced, present Lucy's "education" about women's lives. First, a woman in a crowded one-room apartment who is cooking a meal for her huge family and fighting with her husband advises Lucy never to get married. Then Lucy is seen on the street retrieving a compact dropped by one of two prostitutes, who also warn her about men. Lucy gets up and enters the shack.



"Never get married," a poor mother tells her.



Prostitutes warn Lucy as well.

Still smarting from his manager's rebuke, Burrows bullies Lucy. Before he goes out on the town again, he demands that she have tea ready when he gets back and also that she put a smile on her face. Lucy makes a pathetic gesture, using her fingers to turn up the corners of her mouth—it is a gesture she will repeat four times in the film.



The saccharine smile.

In Burrows' absence, Lucy takes out a few treasures from under a brick on the floor, puts a new ribbon in her dirty hair, and goes out to shop. She looks longingly at the dolls in the Chinese man's shop window, buys a few essentials from a street stand, and wants to trade in some tinfoil to buy a flower but does not have enough foil. She is harassed on the street by another Chinese man, Evil Eye, but is protected by Barthelmess. When she goes home, her father, irritated by his manager's restrictions on his social life, bullies her. In nervousness, she drops hot food on his hand. Burrows angrily takes out a whip from under the bed and beats her unconscious. He then goes out to work out in the gym preparing for his big fight.



After being beaten, Lucy goes out on the street and faints at the Chinese man's shop.

Lucy staggers to her feet, leaves the house, and weaves down the Limehouse streets. She falls unconscious through the door of the Chinese man's store. He has prepared himself an opium pipe and sits and gazes at her as if she were a vision in his drugged dream. She stirs and startles him into full awareness. He bathes her wounds, takes her upstairs to his living quarters, gives her his Oriental robe to wear, and puts her on his bed as on an altar. He surrounds her with all his beautiful things, gives her a doll, and is sexually attracted to her. As he moves to kiss her, he sees her fear and kisses the sleeve of her robe instead. Intercut with this sequence are shots of Burrows slugging it out and winning his big fight amidst the wild cheers of a working-class male audience.

One of Burrows' friends while shopping at the Chinese man's store discovers Lucy alone asleep upstairs and runs to tell Burrows of the daughter's "sin." The boxer and his friends agree to wait till after the big fight to settle the affair. When they get to the store, the Chinese man is away on an errand. Burrows hits his daughter, forces her to change back into her rags and come with him, and destroys everything in the upstairs room. His friends downstairs keep Lucy from escaping.



He takes her up to his second floor living quarters where she luxuriates in one night of loving care.

Once back at home, Burrows chases Lucy, who takes refuge in the closet. When she refuses to come out, Burrows smashes in the closet door with an ax; this sequence is shot from inside the closet, showing Lucy's hysterical reaction and absolute fear. The claustrophobic visual composition and Gish's acting indicate that we are intended to be "inside" Lucy's experience in this cinematic equivalent of rape. When Burrows chops through the door, he pulls Lucy through it and throws her on the bed, where he beats her to death.

Upon discovering the destruction in his room and Lucy's abduction, the Chinese man throws himself on the floor and sobs hysterically. He takes a gun, goes to Burrows' shack, finds Lucy dead, acknowledges the challenge Burrows gives him to fight, and shoots and kills the evil brute. Taking Lucy's body with him, the Chinese man goes back to his room and lays her body once again on his bed as on an altar. Burrows' friends discover the boxer's body and get the police to round up the Asian killer. Before they can do so, in a last act of tranquil and sorrowful love, even ecstasy, the "yellow man" praying before his Buddha stabs himself and joins his child-woman in death. This is the "plot" of *Broken Blossoms*.

## The abuses of masculinity

If we analyze the story line more closely, looking particularly at the visual elements and cinematic tactics used to present it, it will become clear that the



Burrows possesses his daughter as a household drudge. He moves around a lot and occupies the space of their small house with large, violent gestures. In contrast, in that space she huddles and tries to avoid his wrath. The use of the bed as a prop facilitates the condensation of her character into daughter and wife.

film is *about* sex roles as much as it is *about* race. In particular, it is about masculinity. In the figure of Battling Burrows, the film presents the potential evil of masculinity, here safety attributed to a grotesque Other from the lower classes. Projected onto the Chinese man's character are all the traits of the 19th century sensitive outsider, the romantic hero—a self-destructive dreamer who never lives out the fulfillment of his dreams. I wish to examine how and why such traits have been divided and assigned to the two major male characters in the film, and also what it means that the narrative places both men in relation to a "virgin." Finally I wish to look at the kind of role assigned to Lillian Gish and Gish's impact on/attraction for me as a woman viewer both drawn to and distressed by this film.

In *Broken Blossoms*, if we look closely at the gestures, the clothing, and the course of events in any given sequence, we will see that our interpretation of the characters' behavior relies on and indeed underscores many popular notions about what masculinity and the abuses of masculinity are. As Donald Crisp plays Battling Burrows, he uses exaggeration to delineate the attributes of a working-class bully and macho brute. Burrows carries the traditional attributes of masculinity to an abusive extreme. In contrast, Barthelmess plays the Chinese man as being in many ways not fully a man, as woman-like. Compare, for example, our judgments on the costumes and gestures of the two men as we first see them. We notice the ornateness of Barthelmess' robe, his facial gestures, especially his looking upward with half-closed eyes, his carrying a fan, his small movements, and his semi-static poses and stance.



"Woman-like."



Exaggerated brutishness.

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# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA



As the film opens in China, this image evokes the happy family and a well ordered and prosperous patriarchy.



The Chinese man tries to pacify the rowdy British sailors but they knock him to the ground.

The opening titles and the choice of content in the film's early shots would seem to indicate that the initial contrast between a port in the Far East and a Limehouse slum is intended to emphasize a social and moral point, namely that Asian civilization and altruism outshine European and American immorality and grossness. Yet another set of reflections are simultaneously elicited from the audience—an evaluation and comparison of effeminacy vs. brute manliness. In his scripted role and in the connotations borne by his figure, Barthelmess as the Chinese man seems to elicit from the audience a common social accusation: that of effeminacy. That is, time and time again, the viewer seems led to conclude, "That's an effeminate man—or effeminate gesture, or article of clothing, etc." The young Asian man's robe is excessively ornate; in the exterior shots, its skirts conspicuously blow in the wind. It is shapeless, making the shape beneath it androgynous in form. When he is in the Buddhist temple with his mentor, the temple itself filled with flowers, exotica, and ornate design, Barthelmess acts "girl-like"—holding a fan, moving only with slight restrained gestures, and standing with eyes cast down.

In contrast to the Chinese man's demeanor, we are also presented in these sequences with men self-consciously proud of their masculinity, the U.S. sailors whom Griffith calls in one intertitle, "barbarous Anglo-Saxon sons of turmoil and strife." They swizzle down liquor, stuff food grotesquely into their mouths, make large gestures, swagger around as ugly Americans totally insensitive to their milieu, and seem incapable of being together without violent physical discord. They foreshadow Griffith's critique of Battling Burrows.

In the Limehouse environment, we first see the Chinese man huddled against a wall, one foot up against it, arms wrapped around himself, eyes cast sadly down. The soft curve of Barthelmess' body seems to "catch" the contrasting, harsh linear angles of the architecture against which he is posed, and for a man to have his arms wrapped around himself is to assume a typical "woman's" gesture of depression, insecurity, and even sad self-hatred. As he is introduced to us in his Limehouse environment, the Chinese man takes a stance which is as far from that of a masculine doer, a self-determining agent of one's own life, as it is possible to present. In his store we see him semi-statically posed smoking his opium against a background of meager beauty, that life he could create for himself being one of melancholy, contemplation and escape.

The opium den which the Chinese man goes to suggests not only moral but sexual derangement. As a matter of fact, fictional films usually "signal" moral derangement by showing us women in sexually transgressive roles. Here, we see mannishly dressed women in sexually active poses or in compositions of sexual self-sufficiency or dominance, often with a man of another race. In one composition, an Anglo woman is sitting higher than and looking down on a totally self-absorbed, opium-smoking Turk; another shot shows a blonde woman interacting with a Black worker; another, an Anglo woman flirting with a Chinese man we later know as Evil Eye.



Body in soft curves, shrinking, static, alone.



The opium den provides many connotations of derangement. Disorder both social and moral is indicated by ...



... "race mixing," otherwise not seen in the film except for Lucy and the Chinese man.



A blonde, "loose" woman and a black man. Their poses are not unusual, but they appear together ...



only in an opium den, where the Chinese men also gamble and argue — another indicator of immigrant moral laxness.



Illicit ecstasy, sexual derangement, ...



... and the opium couch.

We see a woman lying on a couch, filmed either as if she wishes to seduce someone or as if the opium were giving her an orgasmic experience on her own. She is panting slightly, wetting her lips, and looking toward the camera with an expression that suggests illicit ecstasy. This shot parallels a later one of Barthelmess stretched out full length on a couch, with the opium seller tending this completely passive figure. The equation of the protagonist's vice with sexual derangement and here, with a suspiciously feminine passivity, could not be more explicit.



Burrows eats the meal Lucy prepares. She has to wait till he goes out to eat the leftover scraps.

In contrast, the figure of Battling Burrows is a study in established norms of masculine dress, gesture, attitudes, and behavior. Every aspect of Burrows' character is heightened so as to make us reflect on the falsity or brutal consequences of those norms. What do we see Burrows doing? In the ring he fights strictly by heavy slugging. After winning, he is proud and struts about. Before the fight he makes faces at his off-screen opponent, juts his chin out, and pounds his gloves up and down on his legs— indicating that he thinks a fight will clearly prove to the whole world who is the "better man."

Back home, he drinks and entertains the advances of a Loose Woman. The signs of her looseness are her activity, her smiling, her friendliness, and her initiative to visit a man in his house. She walks in, hands in her pockets, looks Burrows in the eye, immediately moves over to where he is standing, receives a quick embrace from him, and then goes back out, still looking at him with a flirting look in her eye, presumably having made a date to meet him later.

Burrows' typical posture asserts macho self-confidence in a socially coded way, particularly in terms of cinematic gestures assigned to figures supposedly from the working class. He stands with feet spread apart, lets his eyes sweep around the room possessively, pulls his vest down, puts his hands in his pockets to pull his pants tight across his crotch, and sways back and forth from one foot to another. Such a stance is a way of declaring himself master of a given space, and especially master over the woman in his domestic space.



Postural and gestural cues establish ...

... character in this melodrama.



One of Burrows companions spies on Lucy in the Chinese man's apartment and then ...

When angry, Burrows knocks one fist against the palm of the other hand, and when proclaiming his opinion, he gestures with his hand open and palm down. Although he is characterized as stupid, he is also shown as having the prerogative of having his emotions and opinions respected as law in his house—a witty cinematic comment on just where it is that all of us can observe patriarchy as insane, i.e., within the nuclear family.[7][\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) To portray this man's physical excess, which culminates in his beating his daughter, Griffith has Burrows pick up the chair and swing it around, eat like a pig, throw a spoon at Lucy's rear end, and then oblige her to smile—upon which pathetic act he passes judgment. There are many such gestures of dominance toward Lucy before Burrows beats her. Indeed, all of Burrows' gestures in the film seem to form part of a brutal whole.

Burrows' male friends reinforce for him the rightness of his behavior and attitudes. They form a Boys' Club, something all socially successful men partake of and use to protect their men's rights in a man's world. When the men go to the police station to report Burrows' death, the police's cooperative interaction with them reveals an unusual degree of male cohesiveness, for in another



... tells Burrows about what he had seen, first as a racy tale and then revealing it was about Burrows' own daughter.

context we might expect more of a conflict to be presented between the police and the fight-loving element of a portside slum. The conflicts which Burrows' associates do have function well within the parameters of the boys' club, for the manager only wants the fighter to fight better; and the associates band together to get the woman back for their friend once the joke of telling him about it has been sprung.

In fact, the tale was told to Burrows just as if it were a spicy story of local adultery; the man who had spied on Lucy paced his account to Burrows to arouse Burrows' sexual curiosity, laughter, and contempt for any cuckolded man who would lose a woman to a weakling and a "Chink." In a competitive fashion, his friends found it great fun to see the boxer's chagrin at "losing" both to a girl, his own daughter whom he was supposed firmly to possess, and to a man who seemed Burrows' inferior because that man would not fight and because he was of another race. There is no love between Burrows and his associates but a lot of mutual self-protection, and when they "recover" Lucy, they all assume that Burrows would and should beat her both to assuage his wounded masculine pride and to put her firmly in her place.

## Possessing a virgin and a child

Certain perversities in the film are labeled as such by the intertitles and the story line: namely, racism, opium addiction, and physical violence. Yet there are other perversities equally important to the development of the whole film: these are rape, incest, and the seduction of a child. It is testimony to the force of the intertitles and the declared narrative line—the overt story of racism and child abuse—that few critics have looked closely at the specifically sexual perversity of this film.[8] In fact, if we look at the mise-en-scene and composition, in visual terms it is clear that both the brutish father and the gentle, dope-smoking Chinese man "get" the girl. Visually we see both men symbolically consummating sexual contact with Gish. The film allows both men to possess a virgin, indeed, a child.



Burrows beats Lucy with the phallus-like whip.

It seems clear beyond the need for any more elaboration here that Burrows' breaking into the closet with an ax and dragging the cowering Lucy out between the broken boards visually symbolizes rape; indeed, this is one of the most emotionally powerful sequences of sexual assault on film. Yet there are many other indications in the film that Burrows' relation to his daughter is a sexual one. He abuses her for the same reasons and in the same way that a working-class man is supposed to abuse his wife. That is, when the world is down on you, if you are a married man you can always take it out on the wife and kids at home. Aside from one intertitle introducing Lucy, there is no other indication of a father-daughter relation, and all of Burrows' actions toward Lucy would appropriately be those of a man toward a wife.

More explicit in establishing a sexual connotation in Burrows' relation to Lucy is the role of the bed in the visual composition and mise-en-scene. Sometimes, especially when Burrows is alone drinking or with his manager, the composition is toward the room's center, with the bed predominantly visible behind Burrows. When Lucy is alone in the house doing her domestic chores, looking at her treasures, or looking in the mirror, the composition is toward the right side of the room, the domestic corner that includes the hearth. On the opposite side, the bed and closet form an angle, which compositionally becomes a trap.



The first whipping scene.



Whip at penis level.



Connotations of fellatio.



Mise-en-scene of entrapment.



In the final murder sequence, Burrows throws Lucy on the bed.



He beats her to death, on the face with the whip handle.

The first time Burrows beats Lucy, he grabs a whip from under the mattress and stands in the center of the room, holding the whip at penis height. The lighted areas in the composition form a triangle, with the pillow and Lucy's and Burrows' faces forming the triangle's corners, and the whip-phallus aligned midway between the pillow and Lucy's face. Lucy cries, cowers by the door, and clings to the far right wall away from the bed. Burrows is filmed in a symmetrically composed medium-shot, whip prominently in the center, and he points for her to move away from the right wall, that is, toward the direction of the bed. Lucy tries to create a diversion by telling him there is dust on his shoes and bends down to wipe off his shoes with her dress. Here, the change in



The Chinese man faces off to Burrows, as the two men ...

composition from one shot to another connotes the act of fellatio. In the long shot before Lucy wipes the shoes, the whip hangs almost to the floor, but in the close-up of her wiping the shoes, the whip's tail is now at the height of Burrows' penis, and as Lucy raises her face the whip swings past her lips. As Burrows grabs Lucy's arms and throws her toward the bed near the closet, the whip is again between his legs at penis height. We see blurred, orgiastic shots of him beating her senseless. In the final beating sequence, the same connotative devices are repeated, but in a more exaggerated way. Burrows beats Lucy's face with the phallus-like whip handle, and the site of her death is actually on the bed.

Finally, the way Burrows dies emphasizes that his relation to the Chinese man was one of sexual competition after all. When the Chinese man discovers the dead Lucy on the bed and is about to shoot Burrows, both men face off and tacitly acknowledge the other's "manly" challenge that they will fight to the death over the "cause" of this woman. Posed next to a fight poster on the wall and standing with his back to the angle formed by the bed and closet (which was the trap-like locus of Lucy's rape and death), the Chinese man shoots Burrows, discharging the gun when it is held at penis-height.

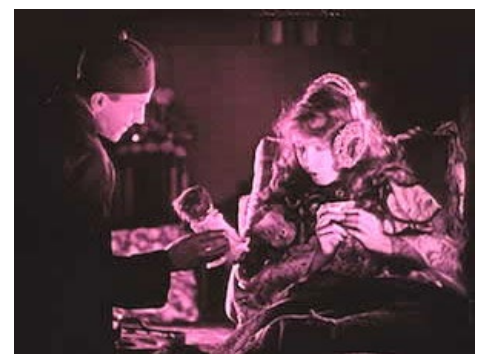
In paradigmatic contrast to sexual violence is the sensual completeness of Lucy's one night at the Chinese man's home. And yet that relation is not only tender and beautiful, but it is also explicitly perverse. We can see this most clearly in the sequence where the Chinese man overcomes his lust just after the girl Lucy has received her first doll. Lucy, wrapped in her new protector's ornate, "womanly" Oriental robe, cuddles the doll with delight. However, her friend with the gentle eyes now wears a look of acquisitive passion, and he is seen moving in on Lucy, his eyes in shadow. Intercut with this sequence are shots of Burrows at his big fight; we see Burrows slugging heavily and an all-male audience, primarily working class, on their feet wildly cheering. When we see the Chinese man and Lucy again, there is fear in her eyes as she clings to the doll. He picks up the hem of her sleeve and kisses that instead, his face moving to the light where we see his illuminated, gentle, ecstatic smile as he goes away.



... tacitly acknowledge their fight to the death over Lucy.



In the Chinese man's room, Lucy smiles for the first time with pleasure.



He gives her her first doll.



She awakens to childhood, maternity, and love all at once.



His desire is filmed as sinister.



He reaches to move closer.



She becomes afraid.



He is sexually menacing ...



... but ends up kissing her sleeve.

Significantly over-apologizing for the man's sexual intent, the intertitle announces: "His love remains a pure and holy thing—even his worst foe says this." In fact, the title makes no sense, because no one at the time knew that Lucy was there, and later her father and his friends just assumed that a sexual relation had been effected.

Griffith seems to use the title to deny the sequence's visual explicitness, yet this very denial creates suspicion about and thus confirms the reality of that sexual passion which the sequence has both presented and repressed. After the Chinese man withdraws, we see Gish examining the sleeve that had been kissed and then stirring in bed. Both gestures indicate the child's emotional, indeed sexual, involvement with this gentle yet seductive man. The visual lushness of this sequence, the child's gestures of preening and of loving the doll, the advances of the Chinese man, and the child's awakening to both maternal and sexual emotion—all these visual details offer a clear erotic message, a message which is then ambiguously denied.



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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Men's options under capitalism



A brute.

Two men, a brute and an effeminate beauty-lover, "get a virgin." That is what I see as the sexual plot of *Broken Blossoms*. What does that mean? What is the power of such a plot? Why did Griffith construct his story that way? First of all, their slum environment, brutality, and opium smoking cast the male protagonists as Others. Griffith safely assigns perversity to other races and to the poor. Onto the working class are displaced Griffith's unconscious, artistic insights about the problems of the nuclear family under capitalism, an understanding he never could have admitted to since he was very much the patriarch, a man who fondly recalled the paternalistic and militaristic values of the Old South and who always had a loving eye for pretty young women.[9] [\[open endnotes in new window\]](#)

In fact, the film presents two key moments of men's lives under capitalism. A man can be socially successful and conventionally masculine, or he can cultivate his sensitivity and imaginative capacity and live as an outsider. Since the last century, middle-class men have had as a model of emotional success either being the "breadwinner" and thus possessor of a home, wife, and family or of being a "free-spirited" (in fact, petit-bourgeois) rebel, usually an artist or intellectual.



A beauty-lover.

*Broken Blossoms* utilizes and heightens this contrast between these two emotional options traditionally open to middle-class men. It reduces the outlines of these two kinds of male roles to a schematized emblematic form, and it displaces the whole "problem" of masculinity onto a story about the lives of the very poor. The film is thus particularly useful to us as feminist critics to show how popular art transmits patriarchal assumptions, for the roles of the two major male characters not only set out two contrasting sides of a single sexual-political configuration, but the film also makes the emotional implications of each kind of role totally explicit.

The figure of Burrows represents conventional notions of masculinity as enacted by a socially successful man. Within that formula, the corollary to a "real man's" aggressively taking what he can in the social and economic world is his "wearing the pants" at home. That is, he is the boss or the possessor of a wife and family, and his woman must always know her place. In *Broken Blossoms*, Battling Burrows seemingly has no wife, only a daughter. Yet in the figure of Lucy are condensed multiple notions of women's servitude, dependency and helplessness, and reception of sexual abuse.

Women's role in the nuclear family under capitalism was classically described by Frederick Engels using the metaphor of prostitution.[10] Across class lines and cultures and across historical periods, we have sold our bodies for sustenance. Furthermore, the ideological compensations given to "good" women in Western culture—the romantic love myth and the courtly "woman-on-a-pedestal" or Victorian "wife-as-moral-focus" myth—are, as Kate Millet wrote,

"grants which the male concedes out of his total power. Both have the effect of obscuring the patriarchal character of Western culture and, in their general tendency to attribute impossible virtues to



Body language of patriarchal authority and the dependent female's subservience.

women, have ended by confining them in a narrow and often remarkably constricted sphere of behavior."[11]

Symbolically, in *Broken Blossoms*, Lucy functions as the Good Wife. But what is most daring about this film is that it pushes Engels' metaphor of prostitution, used to describe the way women are possessed in the nuclear family, one step further. *Broken Blossoms'* metaphor equates the possession of women in the family with incest. Many works of literature especially from the 19th century on deal with the relation of father-figures and sons as the sons come into their patrimony or make it as self-made men, and this has been a favorite theme in contemporary film (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *Star Wars*, and *The Godfather* immediately come to mind).



A visual metaphor for incest. The closet is the enclosed, temporary refuge ...



... that the brute of a father breaks down.



The bed is the location where ...

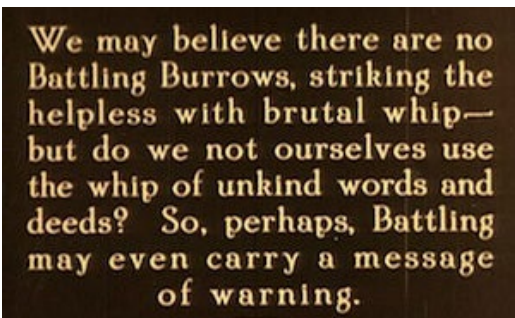


... the father beats the daughter to death with the phallus/whip handle.

But this film is unusual in the way it faces the opposite question, not the coming into patrimony but the servitude of women, a servitude enforced by threats of deprivation emotional bullying, and the potential or actual use of physical force. In *Broken Blossoms* the father rapes his daughter—what does that mean? In Burrows' case, murdering Lucy is clearly the ultimate abuse of his prideful



Burrows and his friends in a bar where they plan revenge. The boy's club exerts its social power.



We know the Brute is bad, but is the film an anti-racist text?

masculinity. In real life, we know that on the individual level rape is not an act of sexual desire but one of possession.[12] And on the social level, as Susan Brownmiller points out, rape is analogous to lynching; it is an act supposedly committed by *lumpen* proletarian men or a crazy few, but in fact rape performs a more general social function as a reminder and brutal enforcer of women's "place." [13]

When we take the second half of the term, "the father rapes his daughter," and ask what *incest* means to the sexual-political structure underlying the film, we arrive at the same answer—*possession*. The challenge to patriarchy that this film poses (or can pose through a feminist reading) is the following: If a man's social world consists primarily of a boys' club, of a nexus of economic and power relations conducted principally among men, how can a man ever set his daughters free or even conceive of what their freedom might mean? For the emotional implication *Broken Blossoms* dares to draw out is that for a man to be the possessor at home means to be incestuous toward his girl children as well as toward his wife.[14]

Griffith is perfectly clear about Burrows' excesses and morally righteous in disliking abusive masculinity, here safely assigned to the working class. We all see what Burrows is like and know why the brute is wrong. More interesting to me, and more ambiguous, is Burrows' complement, the Chinese man. On the superficial level, the film is an antiracist text, but the film says nothing from an Asian person's point of view, just as it says nothing from a woman's point of view. The images of the East, of Buddhism, of racial traits, and of an oppressed person's reaction to oppression are all drawn from hegemonic, white stereotypes. In fact, not only is Griffith working only with received opinions and prejudices about Asians, women, and the working class, but when he sets up his basic opposition of brute vs. sensitive man, he is working with a set of oppositions that have nothing to do with race.

## The man of action vs. the sensitive outsider

What are these oppositions set up by the use of two contrasting male figures—the boxer and the opium smoker? The one character is a violent, selfish, insensitive man of action. Burrows moves with large gestures and commands a large space wherever he is. He is self-assured and demanding, even to the point of being physically and emotionally destructive to others around him. The other male figure in the film is a gentle, altruistic lover of beauty. He is a soft person, often emotionally paralyzed into inaction. He burns up his days in reverie and opium. But even though he would waste himself with drugs, he is basically fatherly and tender, totally self-sacrificing for a child-woman that he would wish to, but cannot, possess. Furthermore, he understands the hypocrisy of most social values in the capitalist West, his solution to that is to surround his own life with beauty and otherwise to withdraw. In his love life, the yearning is all.

The character whom Griffith can demean by calling "Chinky" has all the traits of a male cultural persona which has been valorized in Western literature for several centuries now—a persona Griffith himself surely must have identified with. "Chinky" is no less than our old friend, the romantic hero. He is the sensitive lover of beauty and the pursuer of unattainable women. The Chinese man could have stepped right out of Thomas DeQuincy's *The Opium Eater*, and it is indeed likely that the author of *Limehouse Nights* was influenced by DeQuincy's depiction of London poverty and a young man's opium addiction and friendship with a girl waif.

That Griffith, the artist who always thought of himself and his role in idealized terms, identified with the Chinese man can be seen in the way that *Broken Blossoms*' plot and mise-en-scene constantly valorize the young man's



"Do not give blows for blows. The Buddha says: 'What thou dost not want others to do to thee, do thou not to others'."

The Romantic Hero.

tenderness, aesthetic sensibility, and moral superiority. Indeed, all the Chinese man's virtues are conflated in a romantic way: to recognize beauty and to surround oneself with beautiful things are indices of moral superiority that those enmeshed in the workaday world do not recognize. Only artists, fellow outsiders, and women can recognize such a virtue for its worth.

To carry my analysis of sexual politics in *Broken Blossoms* one step further, I think we should ask why this figure is characteristically male and what his social role is. In fact, the romantic hero and the sensitive outsider (or, to use a more familiar equivalent, the filmmaker and the professors of literature and film)—these people have a specific class position under capitalism; their chance to *choose* that position is the escape valve that capitalism allows for dissatisfied male members of its petite bourgeoisie. To put it schematically, there are three roles available to men in capitalist society—to be an outsider, a worker, or a boss.

If you pursue profit and power, you also exploit others. To avoid facing that, you have to dull your emotional sensibility as you move up in social position. That is what *Duddy Kravitz*, *Godfather II*, and *Room at the Top* are all about. The capitalist has to believe that the profit motive serves society the best and cannot look with regret either at how he is exploiting others or at how his emotional and social forms of interacting with others might be better. Possession and dominance become embedded in a way of life.

Or a man may be a worker, putting in time at a stultifying job for a weekly paycheck, suffering humiliation both from superiors at work and from the threat of unemployment and/or illness—the threat of not being able to take care of one's own. For both male workers and bosses, most of whom are male, there are many reasons why men continue to suffer from rigid notions of sex roles, emotional paralysis, moral compromise, and a crippling of the imagination—and also why they oppress women.

The one "out" that has traditionally been offered to men since the last century has been to be the artist, the outsider, the rebel. This person has the insight and the inner drive to reject social respectability and emotional sterility. He can turn to creating art, living alone in nature, or taking drugs—often doing all these at once. Instead of pursuing money, success, and power in bourgeois terms, the romantic hero idealistically lives by virtues that seem to be precluded if one searches for social success: these virtues include creativity, passion, love, authenticity, honesty, sincerity, beauty, innocence, spontaneity, and contemplation of nature. At the same time, the romantic hero in his self-gazing is also like Hamlet, often paralyzed into inaction, usually ineffective, yearning for the unattainable woman, and inevitably self-destructive. That this is a male role can be seen from the fact that the rebel goes off to the woods or into drugs, but not back into the domestic sphere to raise small children. That has just not been one of the options that men have commonly imagined for themselves.[15]

## Displacement

Furthermore, Griffith's "ruse" of using the Asian man as the romantic hero hides the social reality of racism. The romantic hero is more like Griffith's image



The Yellow Man watched Lucy often. The beauty which all Limehouse missed smote him to the heart.

The outsider and the waif.

of himself; Griffith wrote that he sought to live by the pen as a way of identifying with his earlier and most beloved image of his father, that is, of a man brandishing a sword (and in fact, it was brandishing a sword against a Black servant to teach the man his place).[16] When Griffith came of age in the South, the illustrious days of the Civil War and family prosperity were for him sadly a part of the legendary past. To be a writer was for Griffith to find a more modern, petit bourgeois way of being a real man in a culture not instinctively his own, of being socially functional yet still maintaining his felt identity as an Outsider, and of devoting himself to Creativity and Art.[17]

Perhaps reacting against the charges of racism that *Birth of A Nation* had provoked, Griffith clearly wanted *Broken Blossoms* to be considered anti-racist, but the film represses all understanding of the real mechanisms of racism. Griffith did not embed his depiction of doomed interracial love within an artistic structure that would clarify our understanding of race and racial oppression. Instead, he assigned to the Asian man the traits of his own class, that element of the petite bourgeoisie who feel themselves as individuals to be above economic and social constraints—sensitive outsiders morally superior to the bosses and brutes.

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# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA



He saves her but then ...



... almost kisses her.



If the artistic structure of *Broken Blossoms* deals only superficially with race, it deals profoundly with sexual politics, especially masculinity. In particular, it implies that all three "types" of men under capitalism will desire the same type of woman—the unattainable woman or nonsexually active one.[18] [[open endnotes in new window](#)] Battling Burrows represents the "family man." Because he is an entrepreneur, an aggressive boxer, he represents the self-made man, and because of his economic level, he also represents the working class. Thus Griffith has condensed onto the figure of Burrows traits of both the capitalist and the worker. In this context, Burrows possesses his blonde virgin and good wife and child within the context of a man's possession of his family. As I mentioned before, Griffith condensed and displaced all his notions of the potential evil of family life onto the figure of a lower class man both for his own protection and that of his audience. Similarly, projected onto the figure of the Chinese man are all the traits of the romantic hero, living only for the pursuit and never living out the fulfillment.

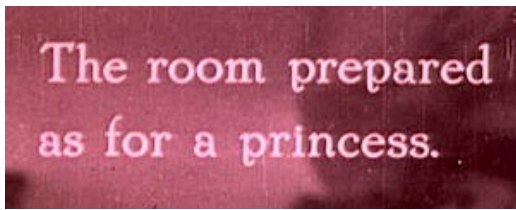
The woman that both men need, each for different reasons, is played by Gish in a way that collapses virgin, child, and wife all into the same role. For the father, she is the traditional good woman and also the virgin child. For the Chinese romantic hero, she is like Faust's Gretchen and DeQuincy's waif or even Werther's Lotte—a figure desirable from afar.

When I first saw *Broken Blossoms*, I asked myself, what does it mean that both men have to get a virgin? Griffith's emblematic schema of the sexual possibilities for men in the West, that is, under capitalism, makes the answer clear. The men in the film live in a world of men, and Burrows embraces that world while the Chinese rejects it. None of the men in the film can enter into or even imagine a world where women are sexually active, initiators and agents of actions and decisions, and bearers of social power.

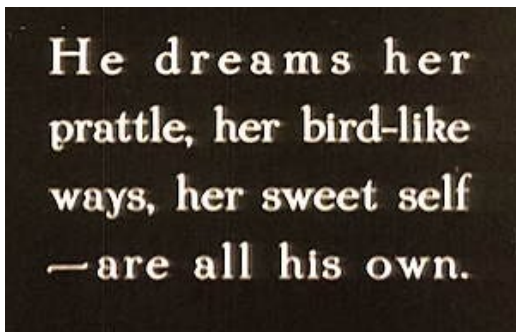
Coming to the same conclusion, but in a contrasting way, G.W. Pabst's silent film *Pandora's Box* also took up the theme of the capitalist's and the romantic hero's sexual decisions, but that film traced the fate of two men who aligned themselves with the seductress, the dark woman. Lulu, played by the dark-haired Louise Brooks, was the mirror opposite of Gish—a destroyer of men and the bearer of chaos. In *Broken Blossoms*, the function of the good woman, the virginal woman, is to be put on a pedestal and yearned for, and after marriage or within the family, she is to be possessed. It is not Lucy's own vision, for Griffith early included scenes that showed Lucy losing all illusions about her future as a woman, either in marriage or as a prostitute.

That all the main characters must die at the end of *Broken Blossoms* and that the sexual-political situation as Griffith presents it is so static and despairing is no accident. Griffith presents a sparse yet emotionally charged outline of what happens when men cling to established norms of masculinity or rebel against those norms as a romantic hero would. *Broken Blossoms* has the vision to present both kinds of emotional possibilities which men in capitalist culture can allow themselves as, at worst, murderous in their consequences, and, at best, as crippling to men and oppressive to women.

A woman viewer's response



He is the first person to offer Lucy love.



He dreams of possession.

To conclude, I would like to try to analyze why I liked the film. First, as I pointed out, Griffith's films have many ways to pacify our superego while promulgating a racist and sexist ideology. *Broken Blossoms'* intent seems to be to combat racism. The fact that the Chinese man has the outlook of the romantic hero more than the point of view of someone from a non-white race does not at first seem racist, since the romantic hero has long been a figure women have found sympathetic. Sheila Rowbotham in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* spoke for my whole generation when she exposed the basic infantile selfishness of that figure as encountered by women in real life, but even so the sensitive, often androgynous man in fiction still has his appeal. Men authors give him "womanly" virtues and also a man's right to be agent of his own destiny. *Broken Blossoms* takes a clear stand against violence and male brutality, and, in the figure of the Chinese man, it valorizes male tenderness, gentleness, and appreciation of beauty and innocence. No matter how many times I see the film, its simple praise for virtues I too prize in men comes through with an emotional power.

For most viewers, the other side of that message, that Brutality is Wrong, is conveyed not through the caricature of masculinity as enacted by Donald Crisp as Battling Burrows but through the pathos elicited by Lillian Gish. *Broken Blossoms* established Gish's critical reputation and was part of a series of films Griffith made in this period that looked lovingly at the small detail and at Woman in the domestic sphere. Griffith's films were famous for their female roles, and Griffith was admired for the performances he drew from actresses and the way he filmed them. *Broken Blossoms*, for example, featured Griffith's first use of the irregular "Sartov" lens, which resulted in his dramatically exploiting from then on softly-blurred close-ups of Gish.[19] It was also one of the first commercial films in the U.S. to be promoted successfully as high art. [20]

Although our attention is constantly being drawn to Gish, she is not playing a woman seen on women's terms or from a woman's point of view. Her role is reduced to the depiction of a Virgin, a "vision" of women often manipulated in male, or rather, patriarchal, art. Within the narrative structure, the figure of Lucy is a term or a marker in a male story about male concerns.

The critical question that remains unresolved for me as a feminist viewer is this: Where does Lucy's pathos, which affects me so strongly, derive from? Are my eyes constantly on Lucy in the way that a male viewer's would be, insofar as traditional feature films constantly have us look at woman as objects in stories told through men's eyes?[21] Do I or can I stay on the film's surface and admire it as anti-racist and/or as Art? Do I respond to the figure of Lucy primarily because I appreciate this virtuoso film role for an actress, one that demands a range from childlike ingenuousness to complete hysteria? By extension, do I admire more of Griffith's films for such roles and for women's acting in them?

Most students I have taught remember specific Griffith films in terms of "what happens" to the female lead and in terms of the actresses' performances. *Broken Blossoms* is seemingly "about" Lucy's plight, her moment of love, and her murder. The surface emphasis on Lucy's story is enhanced both by Gish's acting and the close-ups of her face and glowing hair. Such an emphasis on the waif Lucy gives the film an appeal to both men and women. Although, for me, the device of Lucy's making a smile with her fingers is repulsively saccharine, the way Gish captures Lucy's limited emotional experience and the way her figure is filmed seem so "right" for this sad tale. For example, Griffith brilliantly assigns Gish the prop of a doll to represent Lucy's awakening to her childhood, sexuality, and maternal emotion all at once, and then he maintains a visual emphasis on the child clinging to that doll while she is attacked in the closet. While seemingly fixed in a rigid stance, Gish can let her eyes, posture, or



The doll is a brilliant prop, later used effectively when Gish cowers in the closet before Burrows kills her.



Her pathos calls out to me. I want to protect her.



Angela Carter compares this waif to de Sade's Justine, understanding the play in *Broken Blossoms* between sexuality and childishness.

fluttering hands express a whole range of emotions, and when she is attacked in the closet, she can let her body totally respond to the hysteria of impending death.[22]

Gish draws us in and holds us, and our sympathy at the child's plight both pacifies our superego and assures us that such things happen only to poor waifs and not to us. The other drama, that of masculinity and of men's need to get a virgin, is enacted on a level of the film which I think many people can observe but which goes by relatively uncommented on either by the overt story line or by the intertitles. And on this level, the film leads us all to participate in Lucy's rape by her father and her seduction by the Chinese man, the seduction in fact of a child who has just been given her first doll.

The film depicts interracial love yet hides the ways it makes that love "safe." It protests male brutality yet draws us into male violence and child-abuse. I cannot speak for a Third World person's reaction to the film's ambiguous combination of anti-racism and racism. I do know that, as a feminist, it is my being drawn into cinematic depictions of this kind of sexual perversion that disturbs me the most. It seems a gauge of my own colonized mind.

Lucy's pathos draws me into identifying with a cinematic depiction of woman as victim.[23] On the one hand, as a viewer, I want to protect this girl as a motherless child. Her helplessness calls out to me. As a girl and also as a woman, I have both felt helplessness (even been addicted to it) and nurtured others from helplessness to independence (the teacher's role, the lover's role, the mothering role that I have learned in my female socialization).

On the other hand, *Broken Blossoms'* patriarchal, extreme depiction of father-daughter relations also reflects my own internalized and eroticized fears of male authority, dominance, and control—fears that also derive from my girlhood in this culture. I have to ask myself: In what ways as a viewer do I "participate" in Lucy's brutalization and rape? I know how many levels of culture (from the structure of language to the structures of fiction to the structures of the economy) operate in a way that would encourage me to eroticize female submission.[24] In her key work on the presentation of women in male pornography, Angela Carter compares *Broken Blossoms* to de Sade's *Justine*:

"Sometimes this waif, as in Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*, is as innocently erotic and as hideously martyred as Justine herself, and as a sexual icon, the abused waif allows the customer to have his cake and glut himself upon it, too. She could be as enticing in her vulnerability and ringletted prettiness as she was able but the audience knew all the time that the lovely child before them was a mature woman whom the fiction of her childishness made taboo. The taboo against acknowledging her sexuality created the convention that the child could not arouse desire; if she did so, it was denied. A sentimental transformation turned the denial of lust into a kitsch admiration of the 'cute.'"[25]

Carter discussed the mechanism of denial in terms of male spectators' response to Gish's roles. I would also apply that mechanism to my own response. My



Father-daughter relation: Burrows cannot stand seeing Lucy in the Chinese man's bed.

response may include a denial of "lust"—i.e., my own erotic reaction to my preferred female stars. But more clearly, Gish's role as waif-woman both elicits my own Oedipal fears and fantasies and allows me to deny them. The extremity of Lucy's condition allows me to deny that there is an internalized, "masochistic" drama of the brutalized girl child that I, the mature woman, still carry around with me emotionally. Furthermore, Gish, acting the desired and abused girl, represents the vision I as a "good girl" had to have of my sexuality—it was there but denied, and I long thought that its destiny was to be possessed. [26]

*Broken Blossoms* openly teaches that its configuration of male dominance/female submission is destructively perverse. Do woman viewers who identify strongly with Gish's role sense that *Broken Blossoms* has artistically presented their own problems in such a way that it has brought sexual-political problems to the surface for conscious consideration? I suspect not. As a viewer, pathos has overwhelmed me. When I identify with women on the screen as victims, it is difficult to move away from "feeling" to a more active, self-aware response.



The abused child.



The desired child/woman.

Even with this caveat, my response to *Broken Blossoms* is ambiguous. I cannot help but admire it. In a visual style fully adequate to expressing the complex interrelations between romantic striving and male brutishness, the film offers us a symbolically complete, although schematized and condensed, representation of masculine options under capitalism. Like most bourgeois, patriarchal narrative art, it provides a social and superego "cover" for its viewers so that they can immerse themselves in its flow. Yet here the "cover" is so honorable and so exhaustive (high art, anti-racism, anti-child abuse, male idealism and tenderness pitted against brutishness, female pathos and admirable woman's screen role) that, below its manifest content, *Broken Blossoms* demystifies the romantic hero as a semi-paralyzed pursuer of unattainable ideals and creates a daring metaphor to describe the patriarch's possessive role in the nuclear family in terms of incest.

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# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

### Notes

1. How films assign characters recognizable traits and how connotations are "readable" in film because they are reinforced in the action and in the narrative development are two topics I deal with extensively in the following articles, where I apply the methodology of Roland Barthes' *S/Z* to film: "S/Z and *Rules of the Game*," *Jump Cut*, Nos. 12-13 (Winter 1976-77); "Teaching the Comparative Analysis of Novels and Films," *Style*, 9 (Fall 1975).

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2. For a discussion of the mechanisms of *condensation* and *displacement* in Hollywood film, see Charles Eckert, "The Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's *Marked Woman*," *Film Quarterly*, 17, No. 2 (Winter 1973-74).

3. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon, 1970) deals precisely with this topic and remains a model of feminist criticism that moves fluidly back and forth from historical to literary analysis.

4. The historical background given here comes from Vance Kepley, Jr. "Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* and the Problem of Historical Specificity," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 3, No. 1 (Winter 1978).

5. Kepley, p. 41.

6. Charles Affron, "The Actress as Metaphor: Gish in *Broken Blossoms*," *Star Acting* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), p. 12.

7. I use the term "insane" in the sense of a *system of oppression*. R.D. Laing in *The Politics of the Family* (New York: Random House, 1969) views this systematic oppression from a psychological perspective. Rayna Rapp offers an analysis of the family from a multi-class, social and economic perspective in "Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes toward an Understanding of Ideology," *University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies*, Special Issue, May 1978. And Lillian Breslow Rubin in *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) presents through interviews a poignant and telling analysis of the systematic deformation of emotional life in white working-class families in the United States.

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8. The major exception is Marjorie Rosen, whose discussion of "Griffith's Girls" in *Popcorn Venus* (New York: Avon Books, 1973) inspired me to go back and take another look at Griffith from a feminist point of view.

9. Marjorie Rosen; Gary Gordon, "The Story of David Wark Griffith" (a biography of Griffith based on interviews), *Photoplay* (June and July 1916), excerpted in *Focus on D.W. Griffith*, ed. Harry Geduld (New York: Prentice Hall, 1971). [[return to page 3](#)]
10. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1967.)
11. Kate Millett, pp. 60-61, citing the work of Hugo Beigel.
12. For a discussion of feminist cinematic treatment of rape, see Lesage, "Disarming Rape: JoAnn Elam's *Rape*," *Jump Cut*, No. 19 (Winter 1978).
13. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).
14. Some readers may find this conclusion outrageous, so I shall add a few examples from daily life. We have all observed fathers' discomfiture at the thought of their daughters' sexual activity; at the same time male adolescent children are excused for "sowing wild oats." And with girls of a younger age, when a father yells, "Wipe that lipstick off your face" or challenges, "Where were you so late?" his reaction is a sexually as well as paternally possessive one. It is the sexual connotation of the girl's action that is disturbing to him, and his excuse for his reaction is often that he knows "how men are."
15. For a psychoanalytic explanation of the cross-cultural and trans. historical division of male and female roles into the "public" and the "domestic" sphere, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
16. D.W. Griffith, "My Early Life," in Geduld, ed., p. 33. That such an act was a lesson in masculinity as well as racism is implied in Griffith's comment that his father winked at the terrified child to assure him all was a joke. What was the black servant feeling? Griffith's inability to ask that question in relating this, his most sacred memory, parallels his inability to depict the real mechanisms of racism in *Broken Blossoms* or *Birth of a Nation*.
17. D.W. Griffith, "My Early Life," in Geduld, ed., p. 35.
18. Kate Millett traces the close relation between an esteem for virginity and the fear and desire that women provoke as the "dark force," seen as part of uncontrolled nature and destructive to male-defined culture. (*Sexual Politics*, pp. 72-82). Thus, a paradigmatic variation to *Broken Blossoms* in the treatment of the nuclear family in fictional film is to depict a dark-haired siren destroying families and individual men and social cohesion. [[return to page 4](#)]
19. Lillian Gish and Billy Bitzer, in their respective autobiographies, describe the introduction of the Sartov lens; Gish discovered this flattering way of being photographed and promoted it after she first had her passport picture done by Sartov. Lillian Gish (with Ann Pinchot), *The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1969); G.W. Bitzer, *G.W. Billy Bitzer, His Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973).

20. For a discussion of how *Broken Blossoms* was exploited commercially as high art, see Arthur Lenning, "D.W. Griffith and the Making of an Unconventional Masterpiece," *Film Journal*, 1, No. 3-4.

21. Key essays on this subject are Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16, No. 3 (Fall 1975), and Pam Cook and Claire Johnston, "The Place of Women in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh," *Raoul Walsh*, ed. Phil Hardy (London: Vineyard Press, 1974). A discussion among feminist critics that deals extensively with the subject of how women are presented in dominant male cinema and how this affects us as women viewers can be found in "Women and Film: A Discussion of Feminist Aesthetics," *New German Critique*, No. 13 (Winter 1978).

22. Charles Affron's *Star Acting* provides a good formal analysis of this sequence.

23. For discussions of the adverse effects of presenting woman as victim in a portrait intended to elicit audience sympathy, see my article, "Disarming Rape" and Charles Kleinhans, "Seeing through Cinema Verite: *Wanda* and *Marilyn Times Five*," *Jump Cut*, No. 1 (May-June 1974).

24. Ellen E. Morgan, "The Eroticization of Male Dominance and Female Submission," *University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies*, 2, No. 1 (September 1975).

25. Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 60.

26. See my extended discussion of *Celine And Julie Go Boating* and that film's relation to female fantasies in "Subversive Fantasies," *Jump Cut*, No. 23/24 (Spring 1981).

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### An annotated working bibliography on women and pornography

by Gina Marchetti

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 56-60

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The literature on pornography is quite diverse. The following limited bibliography only covers a few areas of this massive topic. The emphasis is on literature which may be of special interest to those engaged in film study or feminist cultural criticism. The bibliography was prepared with special assistance from Chuck Kleinhans and Michelle Citron.

#### BACKGROUND MATERIALS

Although the following books and articles do not deal with the subject of pornography directly, they provide important background information which contributes significantly to the study of this topic.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 1972. Not only does this excellent study of art and representation include a discussion of the advertising industry and its relationship to the history of art in the West; Berger also includes a thoughtful examination of the way women have been depicted in our culture's visual arts, as well as how these representations affect our sentiments about women and their sexuality. Also includes a discussion of the way women view themselves. Based on the BBC television series, it is extensively illustrated with paintings, ads and diagrams from the show. Excellent introduction to issues of representation, commercialism, as well as the depiction of female nudity. Importance to the study of pornography is clear.

Brooks, Rosetta. "Double-Page Spread — Fashion and Advertising Photography," *Camerawork* (Jan.-Feb. 1980), pp. 1-3. Examination of the nature of photography and its importance to the fashion industry. Includes a discussion of the presentation of violence against women in Helmut Newton's and Guy Bourdin's work.

Fraser, John. *Violence in the Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974. Examination of the media's depiction of violence. Includes a discussion of film violence, the media depiction of rape, as well as a discussion of de Sade. (Illustrated)

Haskell, Molly. *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. New York: Penguin, 1974. Study of feature films' depiction of women. Includes a discussion of rape and violence against women on the screen.

Haskell, Molly. "Rape in the Movies: Update on an Ancient War." *The Village Voice* (Oct. 8, 1979), pp. 1 ff. Includes a discussion of two films on rape by women directors — RAPE OF LOVE and THE PRIMAL FEAR.

Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Avon, 1970. Extensive intellectual history from a feminist perspective. Although it doesn't deal explicitly with what is commonly thought of as pornography. Millet discusses the presentation of female sexuality by respected male writers like Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, which reveals these writers' — and male culture's — general contempt for women. Millet's analytical method could be applied very fruitfully to study pornography. Also included: an insightful feminist critique of Freud and U.S. psychology, and of general misogynistic lack of understanding about men, women and sexuality.

Rosen, Marjorie. *Popcorn Venus*. New York: Avon, 1973. Extensively researched history tracing the representation of women in the Hollywood feature film.

### PORNOGRAPHY AS EROTIC ART

A number of art historians and others have argued that explicit sexual material is worthy of the same considerations given other aesthetic forms. This position ranges from the view that pornography should be studied in the same way we approach nude paintings and sculptures of a different era to the position that pornography should be accepted without any moral evaluation as an important area of popular culture.

deBeauvoir, Simone, "Must We Burn de Sade?," *The Marquis de Sade*. Ed. Paul Dinnage. New York: Grove Press, 1953. Argues that a serious examination of de Sade's work is necessary to any understanding of modern culture.

Michelson, Peter. *The Aesthetics of Pornography*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971.

Morawski, Stefan. "Art and Obscenity." *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974. In a work which attempts to define and classify many types of aesthetic phenomena, this chapter looks at the relationship between art, erotica, and obscenity, and it defines various types of erotic expression. Morawski sees erotic art as a cathartic, liberating aesthetic experience.

Peckham, Morse. *Art and Pornography: An Experiment in Explanation*. New York: Harper and Row; Icon Editions, 1971. Using an

elaborate psycho-sociological theory, Peckham attempts to show the importance of pornography to the workings of human culture. Also discusses aesthetic considerations.

Sontag, Susan. "The Pornographic Imagination." *Styles of Radical Will*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux; Noonday Press, 1976. Focusing on literary pornography, Sontag discusses the value of looking at pornography as art. Emphasis is on de Sade's legacy, including an extensive analysis of *The Story of O*. Sontag's view of pornography, however, remains ambivalent:

"There still remains a sizeable minority of people who object to or are repelled by pornography not because they think it's dirty but because they know that pornography can be a crutch for the psychologically deformed and a brutalization of the morally innocent. I feel an aversion to pornography for those reasons, too, and am uncomfortable about the consequences of its increasing availability." (p. 71)

#### THE HISTORY OF PORNOGRAPHY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY

Atkins, John. *Sex in Literature: The Erotic Impulse in Literature*. New York: Grove Press, 1970. Attempts to survey attitudes toward sexuality through works of erotic literature. Covers everyone from the ancients to Voltaire, Mark Twain, and Henry Miller. (Comprehensive bibliography of erotic literature.) Little discussion of more common forms of commercial pornography.

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House; Vintage, 1980. Introduction to a proposed six-volume work. As in his other works, Foucault examines the way in which broad economic, technological, social and other changes are reflected in changes in our cultural institutions and ideas. Includes an interesting discussion of the changes in sexual mores that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie in the late 18th century.

Lucie-Smith, Edward. *Eroticism in Western Art*. New York: Praeger, 1972. Outlines the history of the graphic representation of sexuality by focusing on a number of recurring themes and images. Extensively illustrated.

Bowie, Theodore and Christenson, Cornelia V., eds. *Studies in Erotic Art*. New York and London, 1970. Brought out by the Kinsey Institute to survey sexuality in the graphic arts.

Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*. New York: New American Library, Meridian Books, 1966. Surveys the official Victorian view of sexuality and personal case histories as well as other fictional works. Includes a particularly interesting chapter on the Victorian

erotization of public school birching.

Waldberg, Patrick. *Eros in La Belle Epoque*. Trans. Helen R. Lane. New York: Grove Press, 1969. Includes everything from Toulouse-Lautrec and Art Nouveau to French pornographic postcards. Many illustrations.

## FEMINIST RESPONSES TO PORNOGRAPHY

In response to the position that pornography is harmless, or even beneficial, many feminists note that pornography is at the very least demeaningly sexist and, at its worst, virulently misogynistic and an incitement to rape.

Barry, Kathleen. *Female Sexual Slavery*, New York: Avon, 1979. Chapter 9, "Pornography: The Ideology of Cultural Sadism," argues that there is a clear link between pornography and violence against women in our culture. Also critiques traditional psychology depicting female sexuality as masochistic and sees pornography as contributing to the notion that women are innately masochistic.

Bart, Pauline B. and Jozsa, Margaret. "Dirty Books, Dirty Films, and Dirty Data." *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. Ed. Laura Lederer. New York: William Morrow, 1980. Reviews psychological and sociological studies on pornography from a feminist perspective.

Berger, Allan. "The Porn Wars Heat Up: Is Censorship an Option?" *The Real Paper* (July 14, 1979), p. 14. Sympathetic support for feminists who call for censorship as an answer to pornography's violence against women.

Blackford, Gregg. "Looking at Pornography: Erotica and the Socialist Morality." *Radical America* (Jan.-Feb. 1979), pp. 7-17. Reprinted in *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation*. Ed. Pam Mitchell. Boston: Alyson Publications, 1980. Argues that gay male pornography is progressive in that it validates gay sexuality.

Brooke. "Feminist Conference: Porn Again." *Off Our Backs* (Nov. 1979), pp. 24-27. Report on a conference sponsored by New York's Women Against Pornography, which included discussions of the relationship of pornography to rape, prostitution, and lesbian sexuality.

Brown, Beverly. "A Feminist Interest in Pornography — Some Modest Proposals." *m/f*, Nos. 5/6 (1981), pp. 5-18. A reaction to a recent reform of pornography legislation in Britain.

Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Bantam Books, 1975. Thoroughly researched study of violence against women. Includes a discussion of pornography as anti-female propaganda, which creates a cultural climate that contributes to the increase of rape. One of the first feminist studies to draw a direct connection between pornography and violence against women.

Bunch, Charlotte. "Lesbianism and Erotica in Pornographic America."

*Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Condemns the misrepresentation of lesbianism in male pornography.

Carter, Angela. *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. New York: Harper and Row; Colophon Books, 1978. Detailed examination of the depiction of female sexuality in de Sade's pornographic fiction. Looks at de Sade's ambivalent attitudes toward women, class relations, and power — in his writings and in his life. Also includes a discussion of the way in which female stereotypes found in de Sade continue to be found not only in today's pornography but in our popular culture as well.

Califia, Pat. "Califia: Anti-Anti-Porn," *Off Our Backs* (Oct. 1980), p. 25. A proponent of lesbian sadomasochism, Califia is troubled by the feminist anti-pornography stance because she sees it as the majority imposing their sexual morality on the minority and thus limiting individual choice.

Douglas, Carol Anne and Dejanikis, Tracie. "Sex and Violence: Titillating or Depressing?" *Off Our Backs* (Nov. 1980), pp. 17 ff. Response to Califia's letter.

Chute, Susan. "Backroom with the Feminist Heroes: Conference for Women Against Pornography, New York City, 1979." *Sinister Wisdom*, No. 15 (Fall 1980), pp. 2-4. Criticizes conference for not adequately representing poor, third-world, and lesbian women.

Cordova, Jeanne and Lobel, Kerry. "Feminists and the Right — Merging Over Porn?" *Lesbian Tide* (May/June 1980), p. 17. Cautions the feminist anti-pornography movement that censorship by the political Right may lead to the suppression of lesbian literature and art.

Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. Although Daly does not deal expressly with the issue of pornography, the second section of her critique of the patriarchy provides a history of violence against women, which is important background information for any discussion of violence against women in pornography.

Diamond, Irene. "Pornography and Repression: A Reconsideration," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5, No. 4 (Summer 1980), pp. 686-701. Reprinted in *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Surveys psychological and sociological research on pornography from a feminist perspective.

Dudar, Helen. "America Discovers Child Pornography." *Ms.* (Aug. 1977), pp. 45-47, 80. (Includes introduction about child pornography by Gloria Steinem.) Journalistic expose of the victims and consumers of child pornography.

Duncan, Carol. "The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art." *Heresies*, No. 1 (Jan. 1977), pp. 46-50. Criticizes 20th century graphic artists for

their sexist depictions of women as victims and sex objects.

Durbin, Karen. "Pretty Poison: The Selling of Sexual Warfare." *The Village Voice* (May 9, 1977) pp. 19 ff. Condemns the recent exploitation of sadistic, pornographic images of women by advertisers.

Dworkin, Andrea. "For Men, Freedom of Speech; For Women, Silence Please." In *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Argues that women's actions against pornography are justified and not an infringement of First Amendment freedoms.

Dworkin, Andrea. "The Lesbian in Pornography: A Tribute to Male Power." *Sinister Wisdom*, No. 15 (Fall 1980), pp. 73-74. Decries the exploitation of lesbianism in pornography.

Dworkin, Andrea. "Pornography and Grief." *New Women's Times* (Dec. 1978, Rochester, NY), pp. 89. Reprinted in *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Calls for women to demonstrate against pornography.

Dworkin, Andrea. "Pornography: The New Terrorism." *The Body Politic* (Aug. 1978), pp. 11-12.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; Perigee Books, 1981. Powerful analysis of the way in which pornography grows out of and reinforces our male-dominated, misogynistic culture. Includes examinations of pornography's relation to politics, race, homosexuality, rape, and prostitution. Also contains an analysis of the work of de Sade and a critique of traditional psychology and its portrayal of female sexuality, as well as a number of detailed examinations of specific pornographic works. Bibliography.

Dworkin, Andrea. "The Prophet of Perversion: A New Reading of the Marquis de Sade." *Mother Jones* (April 1980), pp. 24-26, 50-60. Condemnation of de Sade's life and writings from a feminist standpoint.

Dworkin, Andrea. "Why So-Called Radical Men Love and Need Pornography." *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. From *Soho Weekly News* (Aug. 4, 1977), under the title. "Fathers, Sons and the Lust for Porn." Critique of the Left's accepting pornography as a sign of "sexual liberation" while ignoring the way the pornography industry demeans women.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Woman Hating*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974. Section Two of this work on misogyny focuses on the victimization of women in pornography. Includes a particularly interesting critique of the sex tabloid *Suck*.

English, Deirdre. "The Politics of Porn: Can Feminists Walk the Line?" *Mother Jones* (April 1980), pp. 20-23, 43-50. Argues against pornography and also against censorship. Hopes for a feminist erotica to replace pornography. Discusses issue of masochistic fantasy.

Faust, Beatrice. *Women, Sex and Pornography: A Controversial and*

*Unique Study*. New York: Macmillan, 1980. Examines why women do not respond to pornography in the same way men do. Discusses female eroticism and why there is no pornography for women.

Fiedman, Deb and Yankowski, Lois. "Snuffing Sexual Violence," *Quest*, 3, No. 2 (Fall 1976), pp. 24-29. Disturbed by increasing violence against women in the media, the authors call for women to actively protest against it.

Gardner, Tracey A. "Racism in Pornography and the Women's Movement." In *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Points to the grave problems Black women and other women of color have as victims of both sexism and racism.

Griffin, Susan. "On Pornography." *Crysalis*, No. 4. pp. 15-17.

Griffin, Susan. *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge against Nature*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981. Griffin argues that pornography and sadomasochism are symptomatic of a culture which is not only misogynist but also totally out of touch with the natural order. Draws heavily on literature and psychoanalytic theory to support her argument.

Gruben, Patricia. "Feminists and Censorship: The Girls are at it Again." *Centerfold* (Feb.-March 1979), pp. 86-90. Explains the importance of women's organizing against pornography to those who may see this opposition as "censorship."

Hoffman, Jan. "The Times Square Porn Tour." *The Village Voice*, 24, No. 38 (Sept. 17, 1979), pp. 1 ff. First-hand account of the tours Women Against Pornography have organized of the Times Square district in order to make people aware of the dangers of pornography.

Kostash, Myrna. "Power and Control: A Feminist View of Pornography." *This Magazine*, 12, No. 3 (July-Aug. 1978). pp. 4-7. Argues that pornography is more concerned with violence, power, and men's need to control women than with sexuality, and that it should be condemned by feminists on those grounds.

Lease, Carol. "Pornography: Exploitation, Not Civil Rights." *JUMP CUT*, No. 12/13, pp. 70-71. Argues against the liberal position that pornography is "harmless" and maintains that there is a direct link between pornography and a culture which allows violence against women.

Lederer, Laura, ed. *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. New York: William Morrow, 1980. Anthology of women's reactions to pornography and its adverse effects. Includes essays on defining pornography from a feminist perspective, the victimization of women by the pornography industry, lesbianism and racism in pornography, the importance of pornography to men's sexuality, critiques of research on pornography, legal discussions of pornography and civil liberties,

personal accounts of women's protests against pornography, Black women's perspectives, psychological and psychoanalytic analyses, feminist erotica, etc. Bibliography.

Matthews, Jenny. "Through the Lens Fantasy." *Camerawork*, No. 15 (Sept. 1979), pp. 2-3. Notes that one of the dangers of pornography, as well as of current trends in advertising photography, is the creation of an unreal, fantasy depiction of women which leads to real exploitation. Includes a critique of John Hedgecoe, Helmut Newton, and a portfolio of photographs, *Women on Women*. Also includes an interesting discussion of sexist humor in contemporary photography.

McCormack, Thelma. "Machismo in Media Research: A Critical Review of Research on Violence and Pornography." *Mass Communication Review Yearbook*, 1 (1980). Critique of the inherent sexism in research done on the influence of pornography on violent behavior.

Mead, Margaret. "Women and the 'New' Pornography." *Redbook* (Feb. 1976), pp. 29-32.

Morgan, Robin. "How to Run the Pornographers Out of Town (And Preserve the First Amendment)." *Ms.* (Nov. 1978), pp. 50 ff. Urges feminists to actively protest against pornography by boycotting businesses, condemning the use of pornographic imagery in advertising, and pushing legislators to take action.

Morgan, Robin. "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape." *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist*. New York: Vintage, 1978. Anthologized in *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Argues a direct link between pornography and rape,

Morgan, Ellen. "The Erotization of Male Dominance/Female Submission." *Papers in Women's Studies*, 2, No. 1 (Sept. 1975), pp. 112-145. Using literature and personal testimony, Morgan sees strict power relationships in sexual imagery which reinforce women's subordinate social position,

Penelope, Julia. "The Lesbian in Heterosexual Fantasies," *Sinister Wisdom*, No. 15 (Fall 1980), pp. 76-91. Decries the mistreatment of lesbians and the misrepresentations of lesbian sexuality in men's fantasies.

Rapping, Elayne. "Feminism and Sexuality: The Politics of Pornography." *The Feminist Newspaper* (Oct. 1979). Argues that feminists must fight against the misrepresentation of female sexuality in the pornographic press and struggle to represent sexuality from women's point of view.

Russell, Diana E.H. "On Pornography." *Chrysalis*, No. 4 (1977), pp. 11-15. Argues that pornography abuses the women who pose for it as well as women who are victimized because pornography is an incitement to violence against women.

Russell, Diana E.H. "Pornography and Violence: What Does the New Research Say?" In *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Surveys new research in the field of sociology and clinical psychology which indicates a direct link between aggression and violence in pornography.

Russell, Diana E.H. and Van de Yen, Nicole. *The Proceedings of the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women*. Millbrae, Canada: Les Femmes, 1976. Includes personal testimony from all over the world on women's oppression, violence against women, prostitution, and pornography.

Smith, Marjorie N. "Violent Pornography and the Women's Movement." *The Civil Liberties Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1978), pp. 50-53.

Steinem, Gloria. "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference." *Ms.* (Nov. 1978), pp. 53-54 ff. Makes the distinction between the erotic depiction of sexuality as mutual gratification and pornography, which depicts the violent sexual degradation of women.

Steinem, Gloria. "Linda Lovelace's 'Ordeal'." *Ms.* (May 1980), pp. 72-77. Review of Linda Lovelace's autobiographic exposé of the pornography industry.

Steinem, Gloria. "Pornography: Not Sex But the Obscene Use of Power." *Ms.* (Aug. 1977), cover, pp. 43-44.

"Sex Magazines and Feminism: A Symposium with Lester Kirkendall, Gina Allen, Albert Ellis, and Helen Colton," *The Humanist* (Nov.-Dec. 1978), pp. 44-51. Four authors identified as "humanists" respond to the feminist anti-pornography campaign. Most agree with the feminist condemnation of violence against women and call for the "realistic" portrayal of human sexuality.

Varro, Barbara. "Feminists Aim to X-Out Pornography." *The Chicago Sun-Times* (Nov. 26, 1979), p. 29. Journalistic account of Women Against Pornography's attempts to organize women.

Webster, Paula. "Pornography and Pleasure." *Heresies*, No. 12 (1981), pp. 48-51. Calls for the feminist anti-pornography campaigners to be more tolerant and supportive of the variety of women's sexual experiences and responses to explicit sexual material.

Willis, Ellen. "Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?" *The Village Voice* (June 17/23, 1981), pp. 1, 36-37. An attempt to sort out the women's movement's attitudes toward sexuality. Includes a review of *Heresies*, No. 12, Sex Issue.

Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media. "Literature Packet." San Francisco, CA: April, 1978. Mimeographed collection of feminist responses to pornography.

Womongold, Marsha. *Pornography: A License to Kill*. Cambridge, MA:

private publication, 1978. Send \$2.00 to M. Womogold, 16 B Cedar St., Somerville, MA 02143.

## WOMEN'S EROTIC ART AND THE FREEING OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

Califia, Pat. *Sapphistry: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality*. Tallahassee: FL: Naiad Press, 1980. Chapter 1, "The Erotic Imagination," is a presentation of women's sexual fantasies, lesbian eroticism, and Califia's own fantasies. This chapter also includes a discussion of erotica which critiques the feminist anti-pornography campaign as potentially homophobic.

Chicago Judy. *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*. New York: Doubleday; Anchor Books, 1977. Autobiography by the contemporary woman artist known for her use of female genital imagery in her work. Illustrated.

Dodson, Betty. *Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Self Love*. New York: Dodson, 1974. Contains women's testimony on masturbation and erotic illustrations.

Jay, Karla and Young, Allan, eds. *Lavender Culture*. New York: Jove Publications, 1978. Includes a number of essays on lesbian art and artists, as well as other aspects of the gay experience, including sadomasochism.

Lippard, Lucy. "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art." *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976. Discussion of the way in which women artists have used their own bodies to explore female sexuality and its repression, as well as to critique male representations of the female form.

Lourde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." In *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Lourde argues that women must get in touch with their own sexuality and inner erotic strength in order to combat the patriarchy's destructive effect on libidinous impulses.

"Sex Issue." *Heresies*, No. 12 (1981). Includes many short articles which exhibit the diversity of women's sexual experiences, including infantile eroticism, lesbianism, sadomasochism, etc. Illustrations include many examples of women's erotic art.

Snitow, Ann Barr. "The Front Lines: Notes on Sex in Novels by Women, 1969-1979." *Signs* (Summer 1980), pp. 702-18. Examination of a number of sexual themes found in recent women's literature.

Snitow, Ann Barr. "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women Is Different." *Radical History Review*, No. 20 (Spring-Summer 1979), pp. 141-161. Looks at the appeal of the presentation of sex in the extremely popular Harlequin romance to its predominantly female audience.

## PORNOGRAPHY, SEXUALITY, AND THE CINEMA

Atkins, Thomas R., ed. "Movies and Sexuality." *Film Journal* (Hollins College, VA, 1973). Special issue of *Film Journal* includes articles on LAST TANGO IN PARIS. DEEP THROAT, and questions of sex and morality.

Atkins, Thomas R., ed. *Sexuality in the Movies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. Anthology includes articles on censorship, sexual themes in Hollywood films and European features, etc.

Birge, Peter and Maslin, Janet. "Getting Snuffed in Boston." *Film Comment* 12, No. 3 (May-June 1976), pp. 35 ff. Describes the disastrous impact anti-pornography's organizing had on SNUFF's box-office draws.

Blachford, Gregg. "Looking at Pornography." *Screen Education* No. 29 (Winter 1978/79), pp. 21-28. Attempts to define pornography as a cultural commodity. Interesting discussion of gay male pornography, the depiction of women in hard and soft-core porn, and outline of various responses to pornography by the general public.

Blake, Roger. *The Porno Movies*. Cleveland: Century Books, 1970.

Chappell, Fred. "Twenty-Six Propositions about Skin Flicks." *Man and the Movies*. Ed. W.R. Robinson. Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1967. Prose poem in outline form on the aesthetics of pornographic films.

"Cinema Sex," *Film Comment*, 9, No. I (Jan.-Feb. 1973). Special issue on cinema sexuality. Includes articles on the history of sexuality in the cinema, film censorship, as well as articles on soft-core pornography film directors Russ Meyer, Radley Metzger, and Massimo Dallemano.

de Coultery, George. *Sadism in the Movies*. New York, 1965.

Di Lauro, Al and Rabkin, Gerald. *Dirty Movies: An Illustrated History of the Stag Film — 1915-1970*. New York: Chelsea House, 1976. Attempts to define and chronicle a specific sub-genre of the pornographic film. Includes an introduction by Kenneth Tynan which argues that the most humble hard core film needs to be taken seriously. Includes a number of interesting stills from U.S. and European stag movies, including many from films made in the teens and twenties. Includes bibliography and list of films.

Dejanikes, Tracie. "DRESSED TO KILL Protested in Six Cities." *Off Our Backs* (Nov. 1980), pp. 3-4. Describes the way in which feminists protested the violent sexual themes in a recent Hollywood release.

Durnat, Raymond. *Eros in the Cinema*. London: Calders and Boyars, 1966.

Durnat, Raymond. *Sexual Alienation in the Cinema: The Dynamics of Sexual Freedom*. London: Studio Vista, 1972. Discussion of European and American features made in the late 60s and early 70s, focusing on

new sexual theses. Chapter 10, "Skinemantics and the Sadistic Vision," is devoted to hardcore pornographic films.

Dyer, Richard, ed. *Gays and Film*. London: British Film Institute, 1977. The first essay in this anthology, "Lesbians and Film: Some Thoughts," by Caroline Sheldon, includes a discussion of lesbian stereotyping in heterosexual pornography. The other essays by Richard Dyer and Jack Babuscio contain valuable background information on the representation of homosexuality and gay stereotyping in the cinema.

Ebert, Roger. "Russ Mayer: King of the Nudies," *Kings of the B's: Working Within the Hollywood System*. Ed. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975. First appeared in *Film Comment*, 9, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1973), pp. 34-45. Survey of Meyer's career by Chicago-based film critic who has worked with Meyer as a scriptwriter on a number of films. Includes a filmography.

Ebert, Roger. "Russ Meyer: 'Ten Years After 'Beyond.'" *Film Comment*, 16, No. 14 (July-Aug. 1980), pp. 43-44. Reminiscence about the film Ebert scripted for Meyer, BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS.

Georgakas, Dan. "Porno Power," *Cineaste*, 6, No. 4, pp. 13-15. Using Turan and Zito's book, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* as a starting point, Georgakas argues that, despite the apparent misogyny of many pornographic films, sexually explicit films can and do provide a valuable service of sex education, validation of sexual differences such as homosexuality, and analyses of sexual relations in films of "erotic realism" like LAST TANGO IN PARIS. Also praises the portrayal of female sexuality in DEEP THROAT and THE DEVIL IN MISS JONES,

Gerlon, Mark. *The Pin-Up: A Modest History*. New York, 1972. Pictorial survey of pin-up girls.

Gordon, George N. *Erotic Communications: Studies in Sex, Sin and Censorship*. New York, 1980. Includes bibliography.

Hoffman, Frank. *Analytical Survey of Anglo-American Traditional Erotica*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973.

Hoffman, Frank. "Prolegomena to a Study of Traditional Elements in the Erotic Film." *Journal of American Folklore* (April-June 1965), pp. 143-48.

Knight, Arthur and Alpert, Hollis. "The History of Sex in Cinema," *Playboy*. Nineteen articles published from April 1965 to January 1969.

Knight, Arthur. "The Stag Film," *Playboy* (Nov. 1967), pp. 154-58, 170-89.

Koch, Steven. "BLOW-JOB and Pornography," *Movies and Methods*. Ed. Bill Nichols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. From

Stargazer: *Andy Warhol's World and His Films*. New York: Praeger, 1973. A discussion of the relationship of Warhol's use of sexual imagery to Marcel Duchamp's notion of the importance of pornographic images to art.

Kyrou, Ado. *Amour, erotisme au cinema*. Paris: La Terrain Vague, 1957. Illustrated survey, connections with French Surrealism.

Lee, Ray. *A Pictorial History of Hollywood Nudity*. New York, 1964.

"The Left and Porno." *Cineaste* 7, No. 4, pp. 28-31 ff. Published responses to a questionnaire the editors sent out on the subject of pornography. By Todd Gitlin, James Monaco, Susan Sherman, Lee Baxandall, Ernest Callenbach, and Julia Lesage.

LaBelle, Beverly. "SNUFF — The Ultimate in Woman Hating." *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Personal account of women's organizing against the film SNUFF, which appeared in 1975 and capitalized on the rumor that South American pornographic films exist which show the actual murder of women.

Lo Duca. *L'Erotisme au cinéma*, I-III. Paris: Pauvert, 1958, 1960, 1962.

Losano, Wayne A. "The Sex Genre: Traditional and Modern Variations on the Flesh Film." *Sexuality in the Movies*, Ed. Thomas R. Atkins. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. First appeared in "Movies and Sexuality," *Film Comment*, op. cit. Discusses content and style of the pornographic film. Examines changes inaugurated by big-budget porn, like DEEP THROAT; regrets the loss of the stag film's sense of naughtiness.

Milner, Michael. *Sex on Celluloid*. New York, 1969. Sexual themes in European "art" films.

Poett, James. "Deep Peep." *The Village Voice*, 23, No. 18 (May 1, 1978), pp. 1, 19-20, 22-25.

*Positif: Revue de Cinéma*, Nos. 61-63 (June-Aug. 1964). Devoted to eroticism in the cinema.

Rich, B. Ruby. "Sex and Cinema." *The New Art Examiner* (Summer 1979), pp. 3 ff. Discussion of sexual themes in current avant-garde films. Includes a discussion of sexual imagery used by Carolee Schneemann, Susan Pitt, Helke Sander, Yvonne Rainer.

Richie, Donald. "Sex and Sexism in the Eroducton." *Film Comment*, 9, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1973), pp. 12-17. Informative examination of sadism in Japanese pornography.

Rotsler, William. *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*. New York: Penthouse; Ballantine Books, 1973. Written by a pornographic filmmaker, this is an enthusiastic apologia for the industry and its growing acceptance by the general public.

Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981. Study of the representation of homosexuality in mainly the Hollywood feature.

"Sadisme et libertinage." Special issue of *Présence du Cinéma*, Nos. 6-7 (Paris, 1960).

Slade, Joseph. "Pornographic Theatres Off Times Square." *Trans-Action* (Nov.-Dec. 1971), pp. 3543, 79. Sympathetic look at the people who frequent pornographic theatres. Comments on visual conventions.

Slade, Joseph. "Recent Trends in Pornographic Films." *Society* (Sept.-Oct. 1975), pp. 77-84.

Turan, Kenneth and Zito, Stephen F. *Sinema: American Pornographic Film and the People Who Make Them*. New York: Praeger, Signet, 1974. Comprehensive, sympathetic survey of U.S. pornographic films. Includes interviews with soft and hard-core pornographic filmmakers and stars. Includes information on the industry and the making of these films.

Tyler, Parker. *A Pictorial History of Sex in Films*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1974. Survey of sexuality on the screen. Organized in accordance with the type of activity pictured, including nudity, group sex, sadomasochism, rape, homosexuality, prostitution, and interracial intercourse. Particular interest in sex as cinematic spectacle — "sex symbols" and "love gods." Focus is mainly on the Hollywood feature.

Tyler, Parker. *Screening the Sexes*. New York; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972. On the representation of homosexuality in the cinema.

Tyler, Parker. *Sex, Psyche, Etcetera in the Film*. New York: Horizon Press, 1969.

Tyler, Parker. *Underground Film: A Critical History*. New York: Grove Press, 1969. History of the U.S. independent cinema pays particular attention to the depiction of sexuality and the attraction for portraying explicit sexual imagery in the underground film.

"Sex and Violence." *Velvet Light Trap*, No. 16 (Fall 1976). Special issue includes articles on sexual themes in Hollywood features, the relationship of sex to violence in the cinema, and an analysis of a hard-core film.

Vogel, Amos. *Film as a Subversive Art*. New York: Random House, 1974. Argues that the representation of explicit sexuality is subversive because it challenges the status quo (e.g., Puritan ethos). Includes a discussion of nudity, homosexuality, and pornography. Illustrated.

Walker, Alexander. *The Celluloid Sacrifice*. London: Michael Joseph, 1966.

Walker, Alexander. *Sex in the Movies: The Celluloid Sacrifice*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1966. (Paper reprint of *The Celluloid Sacrifice*.) Discussion of the representation of sexuality and sexual attractiveness — focusing primarily on the Hollywood feature. Includes discussion of "sex goddesses"; e.g., Mae West, Mary Pickford, Greta Garbo, and Elizabeth Taylor. Also includes a discussion of film censorship in Britain and the U.S. and of the portrayal of male "sex appeal" — e.g., Marcello Mastroianni and Rock Hudson.

Willis, Ellen. "DEEP THROAT: Hard to Swallow." *Sexuality in the Movies*. Ed. Thomas R. Atkins. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. First appeared in "Movies and Sexuality," *Film Journal*, op. cit. Feminist response to DEEP THROAT emphasizes the fact that all depictions of sexuality in pornography are a male invention. Offers hopes for a female erotic cinema.

Wortley, Richard. *Erotic Movies*. London: Roxby Press & Crescent Books, 1975. Pictorial exploitation of sex in Hollywood and European feature films.

Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970. Includes a brief discussion of the portrayal of sexuality in the U.S. underground cinema.

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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Annotated bibliography on women and pornography, page 2 by Gina Marchetti

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### INTERVIEWS AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTS BY PORNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKERS AND STARS

Berkowitz, Stan. "Russ Meyer: Sex, Violence and Drugs — All in Good Fun." *Film Comment*, 9, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1973), pp. 46-51.

Corliss, Richard. "Radley Metzger: Aristocrat of the Erotic." *Film Comment*, 9, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1973), pp. 18-29.

Chambers, Marilyn. *Marilyn Chambers — My Story*. New York, 1975.

Lovelace, Linda (with Mike McGrady). *Ordeal*. New York: Citadel Press; Berkeley Books, 1980. Personal account of the humiliations Linda Lovelace suffered while she was a pornographic film star and prostitute.

Lowry, Ed. and Louis Black. "Russ Meyer," *Film Comment*, 16, No. 4 (July-Aug. 1980), pp. 44-48.

Peary, Gerald. "Woman in Porn: How Young Roberta Findlay Grew Up and Made SNUFF." *Take One*, 6, No. 10 (Aug.-Sept 1978), 28-32. Interview with one of the few women porn directors. Findlay directed both SNUFF and ANGEL NUMBER NINE.

Peary, Dannis. "From Vixen to Vindication: Erica Gavin Interviewed." *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 16 (Fall 1976), pp. 22-27. Interesting discussion of the making of VIXEN, Gavin's relationship with Russ Meyer, and of her subsequent difficulties finding work as an actress.

Turan, Kenneth and Zito, Stephen F. *Sinena: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them*. New York: Praeger; Signet, 1974. Includes interviews with Russ Meyer, Radley Metzger, Marilyn Chambers, and Harry Reams among others.

Yakir, Dan and Davis, Bruce. "Beyond the Big Breast — Can Russ Meyer Keep It 'Up'." *The Thousand Eyes Magazine*, 2, No. 4 (Dec. 1976), pp. 67 ff.

Wells, John Warren. *Different Strokes*. New York, 1974. Personal account of the making of a porn film, which was never distributed because of new regulations.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PORNOGRAPHY

Because the field of psychology since Freud has been particularly interested in the study of sexual psychopathology, it is not surprising that pornography has become a major area of psychoanalytic and other forms of psychological research.

## BACKGROUND READINGS

The following are some preliminary readings which may prove useful for those unfamiliar with psychoanalysis.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. Beginning with the question of why women are the primary caretakers of children, Chodorow covers the entire area of family structure, sexual differentiation, and society's interest in both. Both using and critiquing Freud's approach to the psychology of gender differences, Chodorow's research is particularly useful in that it gets to the roots of men's fears and desires to dominate women — a combination of sexual desire and hatred which is keenly felt in pornography. Extremely well researched; particularly valuable for those well versed in psychoanalysis.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. New York: Harper and Row; Colophon, 1976. Covers essentially the same ground as Chodorow's book; however, this is a bit less academic and may be easier reading for those unfamiliar with psychoanalysis.

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Standard Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1960. Freud's most thorough foray into the area of aesthetics/popular culture. This work is of particular importance to the student of pornography because of its provocative discussion of obscene humor (an important element in many forms of pornography) — smut. Freud examines both the social and psychological implications of this type of joking relationship, and pinpoints the links between this type of humor and sexual aggression.

Friday, Nancy. *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies*. New York: Pocket Books, 1973. Survey of women's sexual fantasies based on interviews.

Friday, Nancy. *Forbidden Flowers: More Women's Sexual Fantasies*. New York: Pocket Books, 1978. Continuation of the above.

Hall, Calvin S. *A Primer of Freudian Psychology*. New York: World, 1954. Good starting point for those totally unfamiliar with psychoanalysis. Short — frequently sketchy — introduction to Freud's major ideas.

Henley, Nancy M. *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977. Although this book does not deal with either the graphic representation of sexuality or with the phenomenon of pornography, it is important to the study of both in that it examines the way in which the power relationships between men and women are played out in gesture, posture, facial expression, and body contact. Thus it is important for understanding how women play out their subordination in their movement and posture in pornographic films.

Irigaray, Luce. "Un Autre Art de Jouir." *Les Femmes, la Pornographie, l'Erotisme*. Eds. M.F. Hans and Lepouge. Paris: Seuil, 1978. One of the foremost French feminist psychoanalytic theorists discusses pornography and women's responses to it.

Kronhausen, Eberhard and Phyllis. *Pornography and the Law: The Psychology of Erotic Realism and Pornography*. New York: Ballantine, 1959. A rather eclectic discussion of pornography which includes a survey of erotic literature, a study of censorship laws, and an outline of themes common to pornographic literature. Argues that the "realistic" depiction of sexuality is psychologically healthy and should be encouraged rather than condemned. Bibliography.

Lederer, Wolfgang. *The Fear of Women*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; Harvest, 1968. Useful discussion of the history of men's fear of women's sexuality and that sexuality's portrayal in myths and legends. Pinpoints many of the stereotypes and attitudes found in pornography today. Particularly useful for its discussion of men's fears as a source of women's oppression.

Lurie, Susan. "Pornography and the Dread of Women: The Male Sexual Dilemma." In *Take Back the Night*, op. cit. Clear psychoanalytic discussion of why men fear women and need to control female sexuality in order to fulfill their own sexual needs. Sheds valuable light on the reasons behind the way women are depicted in male fantasies.

Person, Ethel Spector. "Sexuality as the Mainstay of Identity: Psychoanalytic Perspectives." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5, No. 4 (Summer 1980), pp. 605-630. Survey of various theories of sexual identity and sexual motivation, focusing primarily on psychoanalysis and object-relations theory. Contains a useful discussion of female sexuality and the dynamics of power in sexual functioning.

Stoller, Robert J. *Sexual Excitement. Dynamics of Erotic Life*. New York: Pantheon, 1979. Psychoanalytic study of the relation of sexual fantasy to sexual desire. Focuses on one woman's sexual fantasy and its analysis. Extensive bibliography.

## PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON PORNOGRAPHIC FILMS

Recently, a number of film scholars interested in psychoanalysis have turned to pornography as an object of study.

Ellis, John. "On Pornography." *Screen*, 21, No. 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 81-108. Attempts to define pornography according to the various political approaches one can take to the subject — feminist, liberal, conservative — and to transcend these perspectives by applying principles gleaned from psychoanalysis and film theory to pornography. Includes a lengthy discussion of fetishism and argues that pornography may be socially beneficial in that it shows women's sexual pleasure, thus serving to educate its viewers.

Giles, Dennis. "Angel on Fire: Three Texts of Desire." *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 16 (Fall 1976), pp. 41-45. Orthodox Freudian approach to pornography as a fantasy symptomatic of deep-seated desires and dreads. Analysis of a specific film, ANGEL ON FIRE, includes an interesting discussion of the use of a female figure as the locus of the male fantasy.

Giles, Dennis. "Pornographic Space: The Other Place." *The 1977 Film Studies Annual: Part II*. Eds. Ben Lawton and Janet Staiger. Pleasantville, NY: Redgrave, 1977. Contains some of the same information as the above article. Veering away from orthodox Freudianism, Giles draws on the work of the French psychoanalytic theoretician, Jacques Lacan, in order to explore the importance of voyeurism to male sexuality. Also includes an informative discussion of why women are degraded sexually in pornography and its importance to male sexual fantasies.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 618. Anthologized in *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary. New York: E.P. Button, 1977. Although Mulvey does not discuss pornographic films, this essay is essential to the understanding of the importance of psychoanalysis to current feminist work on the representation of female sexuality on the screen and its relationship to male fantasy.

Pajaczkowska, Claire. "The Heterosexual Presumption: A Contribution to the Debate on Pornography." *Screen*, 22, No. 1 (1981), pp. 79-94. A response to both John Ellis' article on pornography (see above) and to his remarks at a conference on the issue of pornography. Critiques Ellis' psychoanalytic reading of pornography and suggests an alternative psychoanalytic model of pornographic fantasy. Pajaczkowska argues that the depiction of women in pornography is directly related to feelings of homosexual anxiety on the part of the viewer. Includes Ellis' reply.

Pajaczkowska, Claire. "Imagistic Representation and the Status of the

Image in Pornography. *Cine-Tracts*, 3, No. 3 (Fall 1980), pp. 1323. Psychoanalytic study of the representation of female sexuality in pornography. Heavily influenced by Lacan and the French feminist psychoanalytic tradition.

Willeman, Paul. "Letter to John." *Screen*, 21, No. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 53-66. Critique of John Ellis' essay on pornography. Argues against Ellis' positive assessment of pornography as the exploration of female desire. Includes an interesting discussion of voyeurism and the control of female sexuality in pornography. Includes Ellis' reply.

#### PORNOGRAPHY, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, AND SOCIOLOGY

A massive mount of research has been conducted to determine the effects — beneficial or detrimental — of pornography on social behavior. Based on clinical observation, general surveys, statistical inferences, or controlled experiments in the laboratory, these studies usually come to one of three conclusions: 1) Pornography is beneficial in that it serves a cathartic or educational function. 2) Pornography has no measurable effect on violent behavior or antisocial tendencies. 3) Pornography and violent behavior are directly linked. One can find statistics and experimental data to support any of the above positions. The following is just a minute sampling of some of the work in this area.

Cline, Victor B., ed. *Where Do You Draw the Line?: An Exploration into Media Violence, Pornography, and Censorship*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974. One can tell the orientation of this collection of essays from the place of publication — a condemnation of violence and sexuality in the media from the political Right.

Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. *The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*. New York: Bantam, 1970. Massive governmental study of pornography. Finds no ill effects from exposure to pornography and recommends the relaxation of censorship legislation.

Eysenck, H.J. and Nias, D.K.B., *Sex, Violence and the Media*. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

Feshbach, Seymour and Malamuth, Neal. "Sex and Aggression: Proving the Link." *Psychology Today* (Nov. 1978), pp. 111-117, 122. Clinical study argues that exposure to violent pornography may remove inhibitions against rape. Criticizes the increased cultural acceptance of the use of violent imagery for sexual arousal.

Goldstein, N.J. and Kant, H.S. *Pornography and Sexual Deviance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

Kant, Harold S. and Goldstein, Michael J. "Pornography." *Psychology Today* (Dec. 1970), pp. 5963, 76. Study shows pornography use highest among teenagers, with interest in pornography dropping off after

adolescence. Typical of clinical surveys conducted by psychologists to determine the uses and effects of pornography. Links sexual crimes to ignorance of sexuality rather than to pornography.

Keating, Charles H., Jr. *Commission on Obscenity and Pornography — Dissenting Report*, Sept. 1970.

Kemp, Earl. ed. *The Illustrated Presidential Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*. San Diego, CA, 1970.

Edited version of the government report with illustrations of the type of material under investigation.

Rist, Ray C. *The Pornography Controversy*. Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 1975. Essays on a number of topics related to the study of pornography, representing various points of view.

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### The woman with the movie camera

by Michelle Citron and Ellen Seiter

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"A man has an argument with his girlfriend. The man leaves. The woman gets ready for bed. Later that night, the man returns, breaks into the apartment, stabs the woman to death and stuffs her body into a plastic garbage bag. The man carries the bag downstairs to the alley where he dumps it into a large metal trash receptacle. The man walks off into the night."

— Plot synopsis, proposed three-minute student film project, Fall 1979.

This fairly typical synopsis of a student film treatment in a university film production class indicates a learning environment generally hostile to women. Such ideas for films are only one of a complex matrix of elements that contribute to the adversities women face as student filmmakers. Other inhibiting elements include women's access to fundamental skills, cultural myths about art and the artist, traditional pedagogical approaches used to teach filmmaking, and established hierarchies in the university and media institutions. As women film production teachers we have been working on strategies to combat these many elements that discourage women from entering filmmaking.

#### PROBLEMS FOR WOMEN PRODUCTION STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS

Women frequently drop out of filmmaking, or they never pursue it as a subject for study at all. There are several reasons for this. First, women film students lack visible role models. Students usually enter production classes motivated either by the overwhelming mythic presence of Hollywood or by film history classes. In either case, they encounter few examples of women in the media. If the male student has an unrealistic dream of being the next Francis Ford Coppola or George Lucas, the female student may find such a dream inconceivable. Sexism, reinforced by the economic structure of the U.S. film industry, has excluded women

from becoming directors. Recent attention given to Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino reinforces even further these women directors' exceptional status and points out Hollywood's pervasive discrimination against women.

The situation is similar in film history classes. Documentary and avant-garde film history, as established through texts, museum showings, and college curricula, recognizes only a handful of women. And inclusion of a few women filmmakers in film courses depends even now on the teacher's gender and orientation. On the film department faculty, men outnumber women in the areas of history and criticism, and overwhelmingly so in production. Even in the university, then, women students are unlikely to encounter alternative role models.

Production classes often treat filmmaking as pure technology, as having no intellectual tradition. Or at least many students perceive it that way. The production class's reputation may discourage women who believe their talents are verbal and visual but not mechanical from entering the field. Women's hesitation is further aggravated by the widespread belief that women cannot handle heavy and often clumsy equipment. We have been asked countless times, "What's a little girl like you doing with a big camera like that?" Both male and female students overvalue men's physical strength. What does it matter whether or not men are stronger than women when both are quite capable of handling the equipment?

To really solve these problems, we need broad social changes in both attitudes and opportunities. But some of the difficulties women face in filmmaking classes can be directly improved by responsive pedagogy. First of all, teachers should present technology in a way which recognizes the unequal distribution of technical knowledge in the culture and the negative socialization of women in relationship to technical skills and information. The teacher must be aware of men's particular cultural privilege regarding technology, and s/he should show an active concern about privileges which s/he does not share with the students, whether these be the result of class, race or sexual status. In film study, class privilege may have granted some students previous access to equipment — in their homes or in better-funded suburban school districts — and also provide them with money to spend on film stock and processing which are very expensive and rarely subsidized by university film courses.

Second, the teacher should be aware of behavior by him/herself and the students which fosters male domination of the classroom and excludes women from full participation. Third, the teacher must reject any approach to film teaching which separates form from content. Such a formalist division is ideological. In particular, it creates an environment where sexism and other reactionary attitudes go unchallenged.

Three power hierarchies affect women's situation in filmmaking classes: male dominance, whether from the teacher or other students; the teacher's position of authority over the student; and the power of technology — knowledge about which has traditionally been accessible

only to men. Girls' socialization about technology frequently serves to convince them that they are by nature mechanically inept. Their unfamiliarity with many kinds of technical equipment often leads to great anxiety when operating a camera, and sometimes excessive and paralyzing concern about breaking or damaging film equipment.

The conscientious production teacher faces these problems: how to communicate much technical information, confront students' attitudes toward technology and control classroom dynamics that lead to women's feelings of inferiority. When lecturing on film technology, the teacher must create an atmosphere where students can ask questions without embarrassment or self-effacement. The teacher should always avoid unnecessary jargon, especially when teaching women who are encountering a technical language for the first time.

In some classes, especially with adolescent students, men may continually laugh or talk when women ask questions. Then the teacher should confront the group as a whole with the situation. Discussing the problem openly encourages students to control such offenses through peer pressure, and the discussion also acknowledges as legitimate the women's anxiety. In labs such discussions, at first initiated by concerned instructors, will give women permission to confront male students in the lab who persist in this kind of behavior. Such a supportive atmosphere in the classroom further encourages the women to discuss such problems among themselves outside of class and to form support groups of their own. Advanced students often use jargon to display their superior knowledge and intimidate the other students. The teacher may find it expedient to discourage advanced students from asking inappropriate questions that simply confuse the others in the class. An adequate response to such queries is to offer to discuss them individually after class or during office hours — when the "advanced" student won't have as large an audience to impress.

A more complicated issue involves the way that the film teacher treats ideas about creativity and the artist. As teachers and filmmakers ourselves, we consider it very important to debunk the romantic myth of the individual artist. A cultural stereotype about artists exists very strongly in the minds of the students. This stereotype has an historical genesis and varies slightly from art to art. Since the Romantic period Western artists have tended to define themselves as outsiders, alienated and misunderstood. Such artists (including filmmakers) are stereotypically eccentric, obsessive, and seemingly unconcerned with daily material realities or the profit potential of their work. Additionally, in the visual arts, an incapacity to discuss one's work becomes the hallmark of the "genius." The experience of making art seems so personal and complex it cannot possibly be articulated. In the Romantic tradition, art and creativity are perceived as the result of uncontrollable urges and they seemingly have nothing to do with work. This myth of the artist is especially damaging to women.

Historically, culturally recognized artists are men. Clearly all of the

above characteristics of the romantic artist are undesirable for any filmmaking student. Each attribute, if adopted by the student in their concept of their own role, serves to close students' minds in a learning situation and restricts any sense of community developing in the classroom. By tacitly allowing male students in a filmmaking class to act out this stereotype of the artist, the teacher may be perpetuating an image of artistic production which excludes women. Adverse kinds of behaviors attributable to the Artistic Role must be examined and criticized in the classroom situation, particularly since historically women are excluded from participating in them (and may not want to participate in them). As teachers, we encourage the idea that in their daily lives everyone makes some form of art. But in learning filmmaking, where technical competence increases a student's confidence in his/ her ideas, men students often feel "naturally" superior. To explicitly criticize this stereotype of creative genius is crucial to establishing a non-sexist pedagogy in filmmaking classes. Socially, we see it as a step towards opening up filmmaking (and art in general) to women, Blacks, Latinos, working people — all those who have been excluded by the historical and social definition of the artist as white, male and alienated middle class.

We find it effective to begin a semester by discussing how students define the word "create (we developed this tactic to deal with the particularly imposing title of our freshman course: "Creative Processes in Sight and Sound"). Students write a variety of definitions on the board. Their list usually includes the full range of cultural assumptions about artistic production, especially notions about genius, inspiration, mysticism, and originality. The teacher can then suggest the earliest and simplest definition of the word; i.e., to make. We stress that in the class students will learn how to make something, and that capacity to make art does not reside with a small number of "talented" individuals. The students' first assignment leads them to become first aware and then critical of all of the other cultural connotations of the word "create."

Another crucial pedagogical issue in filmmaking is how to teach responsibility. The teacher can never ignore that filmmaking is a powerful social tool. The course must not only impart technical information and skills, but it also must make students aware of filmmakers' accountability for the ideas and implications of their work.

Traditional film teaching emphasizes aesthetics and technique and ignores content. However, film form cannot be divorced from film content in a production class. The film theory which deals with visual coding, narrative conventions of realism, and invisible editing certainly should mean as much to the production student as the criticism student. Because so much of a production teacher's job involves teaching conventions, s/he must learn to present film techniques as historical and constructed within ideology. In many production classes a concept like "suspense" is discussed in terms of editing, composition, lighting, etc., and an example from a Hollywood narrative film shown to illustrate the techniques; e.g., the shower sequence from Hitchcock's PSYCHO.

Yet "suspense" here hardly comprises a neutral formal concept. Structures of suspense have developed within a particular cultural context, within established genres, and a major part of cinematic suspense depends on depicting woman as victim. When teachers use "classic" Hollywood films like *PSYCHO* in a production class, they limit their students' intellectual perspective and promote sexism both in the classroom and the media if they neglect to discuss and emphasize specific narrative and formal techniques that perpetuate cinematic violence against women.

In our course, students present their film treatments orally to the entire class and are held accountable for both form and content. We suggest that students make films about something they know or have thought about. And we actively discourage films which merely imitate Hollywood and television. Not promoting merely personal filmmaking, we do advocate content that is important or relevant to the student.

Mainstream films and television, which tend to be class biased, racist, and sexist, consistently attract our Northwestern University students. For the most part, these students are white and from middle-class professional families. Most consider themselves political liberals and have enough consciousness about racism to themselves censor their scenarios for overtly racist content. However, many male students submit film treatments that are extremely sexist. Violence against women is a favorite student theme. That male students have such a lack of consciousness about these issues alarms us.

We often receive proposals for student projects like the one described at the opening of this article. Certain patterns we have noticed recur in these film treatments: revenge films using explicit violence against women, placing women in seemingly dangerous situations which the narrative resolves as merely a flirtatious game, and using violence against women as part of slapstick comedy. In one film, a burglar is shown breaking into an apartment and terrorizing a woman. The film consists of an elaborate chase through the apartment with extreme close ups of the woman's screaming face intercut with shots of rats crawling through garbage. The accelerated editing ends with a shot of the woman backed into a corner, screaming as the man approaches wielding a billy-club. Another film shows a woman walking alone at night. A car driven by a man follows and passes her ominously three times. At the end of the film, the car pulls up next to her and stop getting in and smiling: ki6ttifnL'Slapstick comedy,' portrayed a man hiding behind bushes and repeatedly jumping out to attack women joggers on campus; such images were accompanied by an upbeat Scott Joplin soundtrack.

In class discussions we try to point out the way that such films confirm dangerous social myths, trivialize violence against women, sensationalize this violence, and deny the seriousness of rape. Ideally, the students themselves collectively question these films' content. Often a student filmmaker learns with amazement how many women and men in the class find his film offensive. To thoroughly discuss film content in

class is to enlist peer pressure. This can be the most powerful factor in influencing students to change offensive film ideas and in teaching them to recognize their responsibility to the audience. Discussing scenarios accomplishes an object lesson in both film and ideology at the same time.

## PRACTICAL TACTICS FROM OUR TEACHING EXPERIENCE

In 1978, we (Michelle Citron and Ellen Seiter) became the first women faculty members in the Film Division at Northwestern University. During the school year 1978-79, we shared all the teaching of film production in the department. When we ourselves were graduate students in film, making, we encountered overwhelming male enrollments in film production classes. As teachers, we were able to work together on strategies for improving the situation for women students in filmmaking classes. (In this paper we refer, in all of our examples, to recent experiences at Northwestern University. However, we wish to make clear that Northwestern is a typical rather than exceptional example of academic sexism. In fact, the Film Division at Northwestern pursues non-sexist policies more actively than many other departments we know.)

Despite the fact that overall enrollment at Northwestern University is about 50% women, few women take advanced film production classes. We believe this to be the case at most colleges and universities. In our freshman-level introductory course, part of a two-quarter radio/television/ film sequence, the ratio of men to women students over the past three years is only slightly unequal. The sophomore level super-8 production course shows a more pronounced inequity. On the senior and graduate level, the 16mm seminar course consistently contains only 10% to 20% women. Sometimes this imbalance has been so extreme as to have twenty men enrolled to just one woman in the class.

Filmmaking courses at Northwestern are divided into lectures in which the instructor explains the technical concepts, screens films, and discusses course projects; and lab sessions, where groups of 5-10 students acquire "hands-on" experience with the equipment under the supervision of a graduate teaching assistant. The courses last a quarter and are divided into four levels. In the freshman course, the Introduction to the Image, students shoot 35mm slides and some super-8. A sophomore-level course in super-8 is run like a workshop, consisting primarily of critiques and discussions of the students' weekly filmmaking assignments. A two-quarter course in 16mm filmmaking covers black and white non-sync filmmaking in the first part, color and sync sound in the second. An advanced seminar in 16mm filmmaking is offered each quarter with a different topic, e.g., Optical Printing, Directing, Sound Theory, Animation. All levels emphasize the integration of theory and practice. (This commitment to the integration of theory and practice, as well as the basic course structures, were developed over the last eight years by our colleagues at Northwestern: Jack Ellis, Dana Hodgdon, Stuart Kaminsky, Chuck Kleinhans, and the

late Paddy Whannel.)

In basic courses, for example, we've used John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* book and films — as well as the BFI Gauthier slides on the semiotics and ideology of the image. In more advanced classes, readings like Noel Burch's *Theory of Film Practice* and Eileen McGarry's "Documentary. Realism and Women's Cinema" are required. In the courses using film modes — i.e., documentary, narrative and experimental — as various approaches, we encourage students to think in terms of alternatives to classical Hollywood narrative and use the various film modes to teach them to be self-conscious about techniques they are beginning to use in their own films. Examples of short films which we use are these: O DREAMLAND, GRANTON TRAWLER, LES RACQUETTEURS, THE RIVER, BEGONE DULL CARE, MOTHLIGHT, NINE VARIATIONS ON A DANCE THEME, FRANK FILM, and MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON. Indicative of the problem of having women directors to use as role models is that prior to this year, Northwestern's film library contained only one film made by a woman, an excerpt from Leni Riefenstahl's OLYMPIAD.

We constantly evaluate both the level and our pacing of the presentation of technical material. We have to make sure that all students comprehend technical information. Surprise quizzes which students hand in but do not sign help us keep track of how well the students have absorbed the material. Because filmmaking involves so many "numbers" and brand names, students must understand the categories of film terminology, know where they can look up unfamiliar words, realize that there are often different terms for the same thing (like fullcoat and mag stock), and do a certain amount of memorizing. We often use analogies from more familiar fields such as the water faucet explanation of exposure factors in the Time-Life Photography series book, *The Camera*. Frequently, we explain an underlying principle. For example, before outlining the three factors which affect depth of field, we review with the class the concept of the inverse relationship. Often we simply reassure students that we ourselves did not always possess a perfect understanding and knowledge of filmmaking. Such reassurance helps in allaying the students' anxieties.

When demystifying art, the artist, and creativity, we find that a good alternative is to emphasize process. If the teacher uses as an example a film made by her/himself, s/he can trace the making of a film from the original idea, through treatments and storyboards, rewrites, test shoots, editing and mixing. We emphasize the many changes that occur between the conception of a film idea and the complete film. And we stress that filmmaking is not an individual activity. Crew members, friends, colleagues contribute to a film, as well as subjects or actors who give the filmmaker input. Such an emphasis on *process* gives students a better sense of the time element in making a film, of how the filmmaker may change her mind about certain aspects of the film, or of how production may be delayed while raising money or applying for funding. Such a pedagogical tactic gives students a more flexible approach to the

filmmaking process than most production textbooks outline, and prepares them better for the amount of frustration and disappointment which often accompanies beginning filmmaking.

We structure an emphasis on process into the course by requiring each student to present a film treatment to the class. This helps acquaint the students with each other's projects and requires students to articulate their film ideas and present them in summaries or scripts accompanied by storyboards. The storyboards are mimeographed so that each student in the class has a copy of every other student's treatment. Because we place an importance on these treatments, we show that we stress conceptualization as well as technical performance as criteria for grading. This means all students have one assignment, at least, where the more familiar skills of writing and drafting are important. Discussion of the treatments also serves to diffuse the teacher's authority in giving criticism. Students are encouraged to critique their own work and each others', to think of improvements for projects other than their own, and to anticipate problems with films. Thus, the entire class benefits from the experience of criticism and learns to accept new ideas or critiques from a variety of sources. These benefits do not occur if the students only discuss final projects individually with the instructor.

The assignments for each class, whenever possible, consist of a series of filmmaking exercises, due every few weeks, which the students screen and discuss in class. We stress the idea that these are *exercises*, and that each of them (four or more during a 10-week quarter) is equally important. This makes any single lengthy project impossible, and it subverts the students' ideas about themselves as "auteurs" and their films as "masterpieces." We've found that the more specific the assignment for the exercise, the more interesting the students' projects.

Two assignments particularly interesting to women students have been to make a self-portrait, in which the student must describe her/himself without actually appearing in the film, and to film an interaction between two people, which need not be verbal, or spatially and temporally continuous. We advocate these kinds of assignments rather than an exercise to shoot a sequence "a la Hitchcock", or in the manner of film noir, because these latter tend to encourage the student to mimic the kind of ideology expressed in these films as well as the style.

Teaching assistants must be particularly sensitive to feelings of inferiority women experience when operating equipment. The course instructor should advise the teaching assistant about this and sit in on some of the lab sessions. The person actually teaching how to use the equipment must not set her/himself up as the infallible expert; s/he must promote a supportive atmosphere among members of the lab group and develop a way of explaining mistakes which is free from patronizing or ridicule. "Hands on" learning situations can too easily degenerate into merciless teasing of the women students, who are the easiest targets. The teaching assistants must always refrain from such

teasing and stop other students from doing it.

The more often students handle equipment, especially in a trial shooting situation where the teaching assistant is present to answer questions, the more they gain confidence. In all classes whenever possible, the teacher should arrange group projects and trial shoots. These are the single most important factor in equalizing the levels of knowledge and self-assurance with the equipment for men and women students. When dividing the labs into groups for shooting, it is sometimes helpful to form same-sex groups. The advantage for women is that the absence of men reduces the amount of tension experienced by the women when using the equipment, and it prevents the more experienced or aggressive men in the class from taking over the project. Although dividing into same sex groups may meet with some resistance by the students initially, women students in the class quickly recognize this system's advantages.

In our own experience we have seen significant and encouraging changes in students' attitudes towards and understanding of filmmaking. Yet we have also encountered a great deal of hostility. Women teaching in a non-traditional field initially encounter enormous distrust and disrespect from students who don't expect to find a woman teaching a technical subject. And our directly confronting sexism in the classroom often provokes even greater hostility and skepticism towards us as teachers. It is a mistake to assume, however, that student films which contain violence against women are in reaction to our teaching practices in the classroom. The phenomenon exists in the classrooms of our male colleagues also and must be seen in the context of cultural milieu that includes such films as *DRESSED TO KILL*, *STRAW DOGS*, *WINDOWS*, etc. The problems women teachers face when confronting these issues are increased because we experience such isolation and lack of job security in the university. Yet all film production teachers can do much to improve the situation for women students in a film production class. Dealing with these issues will lead to the increased enrollment of women in filmmaking classes, and eventually to more women teaching film production and making films. What we offer are some partial solutions until broader solutions and ideological changes have taken place.

### Formalism and its discontents

by Dana B. Polan

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Noel Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. 387 pp. \$19.95 (\$9.75 paperback).

The Soviet Marxist critic, V. N. Voloshinov, in his book, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (trans. Ladislav Matejka, New York: Seabury Press, 1973), directed a telling criticism against formalist theory, against the assumption that particular phenomena have their truest existence within categories, within general forms which seem to embody those phenomena. Voloshinov uses the example of *hunger* to suggest that even so seemingly natural, seemingly nonsocial, and seemingly generalizable a category is, as category, as general form, an inadequate way to understand real instances and existences of phenomena. There is no such *thing*, Voloshinov suggests, as the real existence of hunger as *category*; rather, there are only particular hungers — their particularity to a large extent a consequence of the particular historical moment. How one experiences hunger, for example, relates to one's ability (dependent on social privilege) to satisfy that need in particular ways.

Voloshinov's critique is a powerful reminder of the historical rootedness of human phenomena (which is not at all to say that such phenomena are fixed, that their history can't be changed). The dangers which he predicts for any approach which tries to substitute rigid categories for an engagement with the social complexity of phenomena are precisely the dangers which come to plague the work of Noel Burch. For example, Burch's work gives evidence of a drive toward reification — toward the assumption, that is, that certain structures or forms (the forms of film, in Burch's case) inevitably have certain meanings or effects. [\[1\]](#) The central premise of idealist thinking — the split between things and people — reasserts itself as a myth of objectivity: an attempt to freeze meanings in a palpable, static set of structures, outside human influence and historical change.

There's a moment for me in Noel Burch's work where the contradictions

of his formalist position show forth in their inadequacy against the real complexity of the social phenomena he is trying to deal with. On page 59 of *Theory of Film Practice* (New York: Praeger Books, 1973), which is Burch's polemical introduction to the study of artistic form, Burch describes television as solely a formal activity. Against everything else that TV is, Burch understands TV solely as a system of technical codes which interact among themselves and whose *only* real reference outside the formal structure of a particular work would be to the tradition of previous uses of the same formal code:

"By breaking down the barrier between genres and in particular by quite naturally introducing a mixture of the 'lived' and the 'staged,' television has encouraged the creation of new forms and structures based on a deliberate mixing of genres and materials in them and has begun to explore the multiple dialectics that can result from such a mixture."

Any social understanding of television — its place as part of the productive means of a society (for example, the differing functions of television in the First and Third Worlds) — disappears as a formalist understanding. The history of an art as the replacement of aesthetic devices by new, and equally aesthetic, aesthetic devices comes to dominate analysis.

Burch's new book, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Film* forces even further a separation of films from history. Attempting the task of examining the meanings of films in living, historical contexts, Burch loses the concretely historical side of such a project by starting with the films themselves. He encloses history within the confines of rigid logic through the assumption that if a film has this-or-that form, it will of necessity have this-or-that meaning. The very distinction between the main title and subtitle of Burch's book signals the confusions which Burch's attempt to write history will fall prey to. There are two prepositions in the title, but whereas the "to" of the main title refers to an interaction, an open process between films and acts of observing, the subtitle loses this sense of process and attributes all the sense of films to qualities *in* the films and not in their interactions with people. Japanese films with a rabidly militaristic and propagandistic subject-matter turn out, in Burch's reading, to be politically progressive in the manner in which they play with forms specific to cinema (for example, how they handle off-screen and on-screen space, whether or not they adhere to rules of screen direction). Burch pits Japanese film against Western cinema, which he sees as tied to illusionism, a whole way of seeing which unjustifiably tries to use art as a way of expressing bourgeois values:

"In the West, since the eighteenth century, our major narrative arts — the novel, the theatre, and more recently, the cinema, have tended toward a kind of *narrative saturation*: every element is aimed at conveying, at

expressing, a narrative essence" (p. 90).

Burch's critique of Western cinema is part of the attack on Realism which has characterized much of contemporary theory of the arts. According to such theory, several aspects of film can impel it toward Realism. For example, film's similarity to photography presents the possibility of a lifelike representation of the world (a representation made all the more lifelike by film's advantage over photography of adding motion to the image). Furthermore, editing allows film to bring different spaces into connection and so reduce their differences. Much of Burch's work analyses the eyeline match, in which an image of someone looking is directly connected to one of the objects looked at, with the result, Burch argues, that separate images come to share a common reality. Arguing that such a reality is created by the techniques of film and so is in no way a picture of a true reality, preexisting the film, Burch sees cinematic realism as a lie, an illusionism, which passes off the technical creation of film as an image of the world.

The value of Japanese film for Burch lies in its radical refusal to adopt the cinematic codes which would support Realism. For example, certain Japanese films will deliberately mismatch angles, lighting, etc., from shot to shot so that it becomes hard to find a shared reality between the shots. In Japanese films, Burch argues, the inability or refusal of techniques to uphold the illusions and illusionism of subject matter puts spectators outside any accepting involvement with the story or content of the film. The constant reminder by these films that they are films prohibits spectators from treating the films as images of a world outside of, prior to, the films. Representation gives way to presentation: the ways in which films present their contents become visible. The films become objects which spectators can take a distance from, examine, and criticize.

Burch claims that his practice as a critic — bringing into prominence a cinema which is in an oppositional relation to dominant cinematic practices — is Marxist. (The first page of the preface states that Burch's study is understandable "as part ... of the modern search for a Marxist approach to art ...") Moreover, he argues that this oppositional cinema is itself Marxist:

"The claim for the radicalism of Japanese practice is therefore not to be taken as the assertion of some metaphysical absolute but as an attempt to describe the situation which Japanese 'culture' effectively occupies today with regard both to the dominant ideological profile of Western Europe and the Americans, and to those practices, scientific, literary, and artistic, which instantiate the Marxist critique of that dominance" (p. 89).

Burch, then, presents his text as a perfect match of the object of study and the study of an object. It is his attention to form which allows his recognition of a formally complex cinema, and vice versa. But in what way is this refusal of Realism a specifically *Marxist* critique?

Burch fundamentally derives his premises from the critique of the Western tradition in the early work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. [2] Derrida's project has been to attack the certitudes of what he sees as the metaphysical underpinnings of Western thought. Such thought, Derrida argues, bases itself on a myth of *presence*, on an assumption (in many cases unconscious) that all phenomena have behind them a sense, a meaning, an ultimate truth (or set of truths) which exists as the guarantee of particular phenomena. For example, in this view, Christianity is a metaphysical system in which the particularities of any individual life are less important, less real, than the essence to which that life is ultimately accountable and from which that life gains whatever reality it has; the individual life is a superficial veil over the ultimate and final presence of God. Human endeavor is an attempt to raise oneself out of the human condition, which is a fallen condition. We have been banished from the fullness of Eden and from closeness to God's presence — back to transcendental truth: what religion will refer to as God or the Divine word, or what Derrida will call "the transcendental signified," that first cause to which all phenomena refer. In the metaphysical schema, material phenomena (for example, our seeming rootedness in a here-and-now) are mere stand-ins, signifiers, for the ultimate truth they embody in a derived and inferior fashion.

Derrida's *Of Grammatology* is a study of *writing*, a specific and in many ways exemplary example of the act of representation in which forms (material phenomena) — in this case words — exist only to point to a supposedly real, more fundamental existence elsewhere. The underlying suppositions of Western thought, Derrida argues, are based on the false Realism of such writing, which denies its own properties as a material so that it can all the better serve as a transparent window, a conduit, for truth to present itself, for human words to express the Word. Against this, Derrida argues that the only "thing" which one can say is really prior to all other activities is language *as such* — that is, as a set of forms which combine to create meaning rather than reflect meaning. A way to understand Derrida's point here is to think of the nature of a dictionary. To define a word, a dictionary refers to another word, but that other word also has a word standing for it which also has a word standing for it which ... and so on. There is no final word which explains all others, and the only way this endless chain can come to an end is through an illusion — for example, the illusion (usually specially based) that one particular definition is the truest.

Influenced by the French structuralist linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida suggests that what we declare to be reality, what we represent to ourselves as reality, is finally, really, no more than an arbitrary construction, a fixing of the infinite field of possible permutations of meaning. For Derrida, reality is fundamentally what he calls a *differance*. This created word combines the idea of differing (every meaning is different from every other) and deferring (every meaning must base itself on another meaning, the result being an endless chain).

Any claim to certitude in meaning, any attempt to fix reality, is for Derrida a lie, a desire to deny *differance*, to deny the real open-endedness of existence as a game (what Derrida calls "*le jeu*"). Derrida thus reads two possible attitudes and involvements in human activity. First is an irresponsible position which offers final meanings which are in fact arbitrary and without any real, ultimate foundation. Second, a more responsible position realizes the playfulness of language, its refusal to adapt itself naturally to any order of signification, to search instead for ambiguities, formal complexity, where previously there had only seemed to be representations.

In his reading of Japanese versus Western cinema, Burch repeats this split. Western cinema's representational drive — exemplified in the Hollywood film but "operative for many spectators of Michael Snow's *WAVELENGTH* or Godard's *DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES JE SAIS D'ELLE*" (p. 19) is the drive to present as essences a set of values which are really historically bound as the values of the bourgeoisie. Referring to *diegesis* — that is, the imaginary world a Realistic film constructs through its techniques — which is embodied in the *diegetic effect* "whereby spectators. experience the diegetic world as environment" (p. 19), Burch argues that

"the stages of formation and the ongoing elaboration of the basic mode of representation in the cinema of the West point to an all but universal tendency within the dominant cinema (as well as theatre and literature) to *maximize* and *generalize* the diegetic effect" (ibid.).

Burch sees Western cinema as a cinema of presence, effacing its film form to involve its spectators in a universe supposedly beyond the fact of the film itself. For Burch, there is nothing inherent in the cinema that should have propelled it toward representation. In work on early (pre-1915) Western cinema, Burch has claimed to discover a cinema that obeyed few of the rules of what cinema should be.<sup>[3]</sup> As one example, Burch cites the case of the early filmmaker, Edwin S. Porter, many of whose films deny any narrative links between separate scenes (to such a degree that Porter's adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is incomprehensible unless one already knows the story. Instead of adding up to one total narrative effect, the scenes in many Porter films refuse to express a story. It was this kind of cinema, one which Burch argues gave full rein to arbitrariness and a playful lack of fixed techniques and purposes, that was repressed, reduced, fixed into the diegetic cinema that Burch sees dominating Western film practice.

For Burch, Japanese cinema is, like primitive Western cinema, a practice which resists codes of representation; it is the *differance* which Western cinema does not admit. Like primitive cinema which was inspired by vaudeville and other playful arts, Japanese cinema derives from popular practices (for example, the formal experimentation of Kabuki theatre) which refused to surrender their own awareness of form to the needs of realism and diegesis. Indeed, through a survey of

Japanese arts, Burch argues that at a fundamental level, the Japanese way of life is opposed to the fixity of meanings. This appears most directly in the orthography of the Japanese language, which combines phonetic and non-phonetic systems without subordinating one to the other and prevents any sense of the rightness, the naturalness of any one system. Japanese cinema, Burch argues, is not one which holds its signifiers to a function of communicating a signified. Instead, there is a separation of elements in which the priority of the signified is exposed to criticism, is exposed in its fragility. For example, one central practice of the Japanese cinema before the pressure of certain "Westernizing" tendencies was the use of Benshi, a male narrator who stood next to the screen and provided his commentary, often a critical one, on the proceedings of the film. The Benshi, Burch suggests, reasserted the film's quality *as film*.

Now in certain cases, the presence of the Benshi might have done just that. But the effects (psychological, emotional, ideological) of such a technique cannot be decided in advance just on the basis of that technique. Any technique has a different force, indeed a different identity, in each individual situation in which it finds itself. As he criticizes the myth of presence, Burch unwittingly admits and indeed starts from a central premise of that myth: that there are some techniques which inherently move toward Realism and others which inherently move away from it. Burch reverses the Realist argument (for Burch, it is unrealistic technique which is valuable; for the Realist, it is the contrary). But he stays within the same framework with his acceptance of the myths of inevitability and universality.

Against such a myth (whether Realist or anti-Realist) of the inevitable meaning of certain forms, I would argue that any technique, any practice, is only one practice among others in the social field. Any practice is interrelated in a complex way with other practices — for example, class relations, ideological relations, sexual relations — influencing them (and influenced by them) but not reducible to any other practice. Language, for example, is only a component of the social fabric. This is not to argue, though, that it has no force, that acts of language have no social power. Quite the contrary, the structure of social practices is such that each practice must have an effect on other practices. But this force is variable, so that it cannot be assumed that language or any other practice will always work in the system in the same way. For example, in a class society, the effect and force of language will vary across class lines.

For example, the petit-bourgeoisie often equates linguistic practice (for example, the language-transforming practice of the avant-garde) and revolutionary practice, thus arguing that a radical use of language will lead to a radical kind of action. One of the reasons for such a stance is related to that class's power and possession in the realm of words and its relative vulnerability in political realms (such as state power). For example, as Walter Benjamin suggests in his *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (trans. Harry Zohn, London:

New Left Books, 1973), the aggressive stance of Charles Baudelaire's poetry toward the public life of Paris care from Baudelaire's recognition that the marketplace mentality of this public had made the role of the lyric poet, like Baudelaire, a marginal one. But precisely because of this marginality, Baudelaire could strike back only in the limited realm of poetry, trying to turn the bourgeoisie's language against itself.

That a practice has (or could have) a particular force in a particular social situation is not to grant it a total or enduring power. More important, it is not so much anything in the practice itself that has force but its relation with other elements, which can make it effective in a particular way. For example, whatever force a Baudelaire's writing might have depends not only on meanings and forms in the poetry but also on a whole array of equally necessary factors. Among them are a system of distribution (for example, publishers interested in printing poetry) and appropriate forms of reading (including the very existence of readers with the time and training to read lyric poetry). At the very least, claims about this or that effect for a particular practice need to account for the social world in which that act occurs. It is this sense of the historical situation (for example, who is the audience for what art and why) which is regrettably absent in much investigation of artistic practices. Instead, most theories tend to be object-oriented, assuming that if the artwork has a particular quality, it will have a necessary effect. In valorizations of the avant-garde, especially, any attention to the variability of possible spectator responses drops out as the theory creates a "formal spectator," a spectator outside of history, outside class. Yet in another way that spectator is inside class, since the generalized spectator which the theory invokes is usually a projection of the theorist's own values onto the spectating act. [4]

The problem of formalism is twofold. First, it grants force to a practice on the basis of *internal* qualities of that practice. The potential effect of the practice is pulled out of a context and given an unequivocal and universal definition. Second, formalism assumes that the force which it has thus imputed to a form will tend to be the same for all spectators. Enumerating, describing materials in art forms, formalism assumes that the effect of practices derives foremost from those materials themselves. All that's required of the human observer is a point of view appropriate to the discovery of that form and its singular meaning. In other words, a given form (for example, the invisible cut) has in formalist understanding a meaning in general, an effect which, as in all formalisms, is a consequence of the nature of the form.

While critics in the Derridean tradition inflect this formalism by an attention to practices (such as Primitive cinema) which they see as escaping the impositions, the fixities, of set forms, this promotion of oppositional forms is no more than a modification in which the original formalism — generalities about the effects of narrative, about the tie between ideology and formal practice — continues to hold sway. The valorization of avant-garde practices in formalist theory is a valorization of those practices *against*: against narrative, illusionism, and

representation as inevitably bound to certain effects as a consequence of their forms. The problem is that the effects which formalism imputes to practices are effects projected onto forms *by the theory of those forms*. In other words, it is the theory which creates meaning, and not the objects of the theory.

Now there is nothing necessarily wrong with this aspect of the theory. Every theory — indeed, every act of understanding — in some way constructs its objects rather than simply understanding objects separate from the observer's point of view. But this suggests that any act of theorizing necessitates a self-critical attitude, an attention to what knowledge one is coming up with and why, an attention to the ways procedures of investigation influence the kinds of discoveries one makes.

In the case of film theory, this could mean an attention to differences or similarities between a theorist's ways of looking at a film and other situations of looking. For example, one could ask if certain social and class privileges allow the theorist to look at films in a unique way (such as the recourse by Burch and other theorists interested in moment-by-moment inflections in form to motion-analyzing equipment, which allows them to slow down or reverse or stop films when they want). It is a way of looking which makes the film a different one than it would be when projected nonstop in a theatre. Burch's practice is precisely an individualistic one in which a solitary critic ("I was able to screen rare films in my hotel room when I unwittingly arrived in Kyoto on the eve of a holiday" — p. 8) creates meaning by his particular mode of analysis, but then he passes this meaning off as meaning contained in the film and not in the interpretation. This is not to say that Burch's way of viewing is wrong while some kind of "average" or "ordinary" viewing (as if there is such a thing) would be right. Rather, I'm suggesting that every viewing takes its specific identity from its context (who's viewing, why, how), a context which is determinant for meaning. This context cannot be washed away; it can, however, be studied, reflected upon.

The precise function of formalism in its attitude toward viewing is to deny the interpretive place, the context, of the theorist; it is to move from meanings between text and viewer to meanings supposedly objectively in the text. If, as formalism assumes, "there is a generality of ideology in the institution, 'before' the production of a particular ideological position," as Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow contend — in other words, that forms already tend toward a particular meaning before they exist in a specific historical situation — then the critic's role is to deny the specific ways in which he or she makes the meaning of the film and instead to move toward some sort of ideal ideological meaning which the text supposedly has. [5] Such an approach has tended to create an image of the theorist as an observer outside history, outside class. It is an image of criticism which, in the least self-conscious theory, assumes that particular films will always mean in set ways to its audiences.

In Burch, this inability to think out his own place as theorist in relation to the objects he is studying shows up most clearly as a contradiction and incompatibility of the goals he sets for the study of Japanese film. Burch echoes French cultural critic Roland Barthes' use of Japan as a fictional construct in his book, *L'Empire des signes* (Paris: Editions d'Art, 1970; reprinted 1980): Burch approvingly quotes Barthes' declaration that one can

"without claiming to represent or analyze any reality whatsoever ... gather somewhere out in the world ... a number of features ... and with these features form a system. It is this system which I [Barthes] will call Japan."

If, as I've suggested, any attempt to *know* a system "somewhere out in the world" is necessarily filtered through and altered by the knower's own perspective, then Burch's borrowing of an East as a system of codes useful for intervention in the practices of the West has nothing inherently wrong about it. [\[6\]](#)

But two hesitations about such a project are necessary. First, given that there is a real, living Japan, there may be a kind of cultural imperialism in an attempt to create a fictive Japan — the real one denied or even repressed in those moments when it doesn't fit the model. [\[7\]](#) An example of this occurs on page 173, when Burch interprets the oft-noted (and incorrectly designated) use of "low-angle camera position which has come to be identified with the films of Ozu." (There are few low-angle shots but many scenes shot from a low camera height.) Burch notes that

"many 'expressive' explanations have been offered, of which the most pertinent is Sato Tadao's suggestion that this position endows all pro-filmic activity with a 'ceremonial quality.'"

But Burch goes on to counter this interpretation:

"This peculiarly Japanese reaction is perhaps difficult for us to appreciate fully except insofar as religious and other ceremonies in Japan do take place close to the floor and involve low bows and prostration. However, the key to Ozu's specific, radical use of this procedure lies in more theoretical considerations ..."

Here is a clear case of Burch's refusal to admit that his reading is precisely that: a specific *interpretation*. Instead, against the Japanese critic's imputed inability to know what Japanese cinema is up to, Burch has the "key." The phrasing by which Burch assigns "radical use" to Ozu's films and not to Burch's reading is precisely that procedure which attempts to objectify a subjective position. Although Burch's title suggests that he is trying to assume the position of outside observer and not participant, this position is constantly belied by his attempt to speak for the Japanese, to explain what their texts mean. This in a writer who

admits he doesn't know Japanese very well and relies on "authority" texts for much of his historical information.

Burch even goes so far as to see his inability to understand spoken Japanese as an advantage since it supposedly allows him to concentrate on formal aspects of "nodes of representation" and not be distracted by the expressive functions of sound. Yet sound is not just an aspect of content but also part of the formal structure. Even the most seemingly representational, expressive Hollywood film would gain in formal complexity and would seem less expressive and more experimental if one didn't understand English. From his assumed position of superiority Burch declares that Japanese thought is lacking in theoretical insight or rigor — he talks of "the Japanese disdain of theoretical practice" (p. 12). And so he steps in to provide that theory:

"One of the principal assumptions of this study is that the critical framework developed in France over the past decade ... provides elements toward an understanding of the far-reaching implications of *le texte japonais* (the Japanese text]" (p. 13).

Even if Burch's text reveals an inevitable shaping of object by theory, it is still necessary to evaluate the uses of that shaping. If all theory is selection, reduction, an structuring, we can nonetheless ask the value of what has been selected, how it's been reduced, and what effect that structuring will have. In asking this of *To the Distant Observer*, the second problem of Burch's historical method presents itself.

Burch's claim to construct *les texts japonais* enters into direct contradiction with his other goal: to write a real, objectively true *history* of Japanese cinema. On the first page of text, Burch writes, "My approach is, of course, historical in every sense." But history, in most senses, can't be written by a distant observer, especially when that distant observer filters the object of his/her history through different cultural structures (in Burch's case, his place in a particular tradition of critical theory interested in questions of formal innovation). Burch superimposes his concerns — the value of formal innovation as against representation and expression — onto the whole value system of Japanese culture without examining how or if these might be relevant or even operative values in another system.

In this, it seems to me that he ignores a fundamental point about art's integration into a society's systems of representations, a point most clearly elucidated by the art historian Ernst Gombrich, in his *Art and Illusion* (Princeton University Press, 1960). Namely, what a society considers as fitting or subverting its systems of representations is not something in, or objectively definable in, the art itself but rather is a definition by the society of the place of that art. To take one of Gombrich's examples, the first drawings of rhinoceroses by European travelers to Africa depicted the rhinos as wearing a coat of armor. The artists were assimilating a new experience to one they already know (coats of armor for humans). However, because this was how rhinos looked to them, the Europeans overlooked, did not even see, the

disparities between the drawings and the actual look of rhinos. The forms the artists used took their meanings from within a social context; it was this context which defined what was real and what wasn't.

Formal innovation, Gombrich suggests, is not some inherent value nor some eternally progressive attribute of all art at all places, at all times. Indeed, Gombrich goes so far as to argue that a particular way of seeing, upheld by a group's whole system of values, may lead to a kind of overlooking, a not-seeing of elements which don't fit the way of seeing of that particular group. The early drawings of rhinos may seem unreal in the twentieth century but it is our own value system, different from an earlier one, which determines this sense of "unreality."

Burch's text is precisely an act of interpretation, a point of view, which won't admit that that's what it is. Revealingly, the essay, "Positions," which Burch co-wrote with Jorge Dana, demonstrates the kinds of sleight-of-hand which Burch has to engage in to avoid confronting the question of just what reading and interpreting are. [8] "Positions" argues that even though moments in Fritz Lang's *SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR* (1948) unveil the project of illusion in a film committed overall to the tenets of illusionism, these moments are overlooked by Western spectators whose habit of seeing films as expressions of life causes them to ignore, or minimize, non-expressive or even anti-expressive elements:

"the upward tilted master shot shows them [the newlyweds of the story] against a back-drop onto which the shadows of some stylized foliage is projected. It is a completely 'unreal' image which, at the same time, *could never be perceived as such by the 'average' cinema-goer accustomed as he [sic] is to accepting landscapes painted, back projections, and the like, as image of reality*" ("Positions," p. 65-66, my emphasis).

Burch and Dana acknowledge that *SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR* has a moment which is not immediately a moment of Realism. But because the film is a Hollywood film and not a Japanese one, Burch and Dana have to explain this moment away, to suggest that the audiences wouldn't have noticed its unreality. While Burch admits here that force of habit can change, can reduce, the potential effect of formal innovation, he refuses in *To the Distant Observer* to admit that the same kind of practice could happen in the watching of Japanese film, that spectators there could also learn to read the films as "images of reality." Significantly, that such films often appear expressive has been precisely the experience of many viewers (see, for example, Sato Tadao's aforementioned understanding of Ozu, an understanding which Burch has to dismiss as "peculiarly Japanese").

What formalism institutes is a clear-cut split between two practices — representational art and representational ways of seeing on the one hand and innovative art and innovative ways of seeing on the other — and it irrevocably decides which side certain films belong on. History

takes the form of two monoliths facing each other. It is this starting point which consigns formalism to its limitations. Most prominent among these limitations is its inability to deal with contradiction in anything but a mechanical way. The monoliths are in place, complete and whole, and the only possible contradiction that can exist is the eternal one between them. Burch's theory is a replay of the assumptions of manipulation theory, of an elitist theory of art which assumes that a mass art like that of Hollywood can never be anything but repressive and manipulative of its audience. As the case of *SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR* shows, Burch sees a whole order of cinema as tied, without any internal contradictions, to a repressive function, and another cinema tied, without any internal contradiction, to a critique of that repression.

It is certainly true that there is a regularity to the presence of certain kinds of forms in certain kinds of cinema. For example, as the quantitative research of Barry Salt demonstrates, there is a statistically verifiable preponderance of certain shot lengths, camera distances, etc., in Hollywood films of the 1940s. [\[9\]](#) But that doesn't necessarily imply that any particular effect inherently exists in those techniques; all it literally tells us is that those techniques recur to such and such a degree. Any assignation of a particular effect to the forms will have to come either from the projections of interpretations onto form or from historical research on the ways of seeing which adhere in particular viewing situations.

More than that, generalizations about a form can only work at the expense of denying the ways particular films can employ those forms in the whole fabric of the film. Formal analysis is not irrelevant to political criticism — the deployment of techniques is indeed a source of the meaning-effect of a film. But formal qualities can only be studied in terms of their particular viewing situations and in particular films. In an extreme lapse into formalism, Christian Metz suggests that off-screen characters *automatically* invite audience identification since the audience is in a similar off-screen state. [\[10\]](#) But this is to ignore the ways particular kinds of off-screen characters (for example, the monster lurking off-screen as the target of an on-screen character's look) might deflect any generalizable quality of identification, if indeed such a general condition exists. Metz's position here is a return to that "generality in the institution" which Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow refer to and which encloses the open-endedness of artistic practice within the bounds of categorical thinking.

In a useful rejoinder to the argument that there is a political inevitability to the meaning of film techniques. Philip Rosen has shown how one cut in *SEVENTH HEAVEN* (Frank Borzage, 1927) undermines the previous coherence of the film's narrative. [\[11\]](#) A classic Hollywood film, *SEVENTH HEAVEN* deals with two lovers separated by war but who deny any danger to their situation because they believe that their love is higher and stronger than all other forces. The hero is gravely wounded at the front, and we see a priest administer the last rites. In the next scene, the same priest goes to the girlfriend back in the States to tell her

of the boyfriend's death, and now that she is on her own, the girlfriend begins to accept the courtship of another man. Cut to: the hero struggling through a crowd to get home, not really dead after all.

Rosen reads this ultimate denial of the laws of death as a consequence of Borzage's contradictory beliefs as both a materialist and a spiritualist. Although perhaps too reliant on biographical information and analysis of authorial psychology, Rosen's reading of *contradiction* here is an important one because it emphasizes the contradictory insertion of any text into a social moment and the contradictory place of any particular technique in the particular practice of a film. The cut here gains its meanings from its place *here*, in this film, in relation to Borzage's politics, in relation to Rosen's own perspective as critic.

In contrast to this open-ended understanding of the politics of technique, of the possible meanings of the institution of cinema, formalism tries to limit contradiction by deciding in advance what is contradictory and what isn't. It treats certain practices as always fixed in meaning and so ends up as a more theoretically refined version of the complex-art/mass-art split which has plagued theory of film from its inception. Mass art in this view is the world of representational texts on the one side and passive spectators on the other side, bound by the manipulating powers of the text. Rosen's point, against this, is that texts don't express or practice *an* ideology. They exist as part of a complex and contradictory interweaving of ideological practices, a *plurality* of effects which differs for each different insertion of the text into social practices. Any text is internally contradictory because its social field is contradictory.

Formalism, however, can only recognize external contradiction; the cinema is a given, a fixed institution working to set ends, a collection of meanings which is always predictable in its workings. Contradiction, in this formalism, is either something that the text generates and then, represses (as is the case for Burch with *SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR*) or something that can only assail the institution of cinema from a position of marginality (as is the case for Burch with the Japanese cinema — a cinema most of whose texts are not available in the West).

In concentrating on narrative and representation as the forms which it deems most linked to bourgeois ideology, contemporary formalist theory gives an exaggerated importance to those forms. It assumes that the ideological force of a social practice, as either supportive or critical, lies solely in the way that practice upholds or refuses illusionism. Political struggle becomes a battle of the coded against that which escapes the repressions of the code. The existing political system becomes a place of homogeneity, coherence, organization, while subversion becomes the realm of the alogical, the trans-rational, the avant-garde. This sets up a dichotomy which is problematic both as a dichotomy and in the values or qualities it assigns to respective terms.

What happens to the notion of progressive cinema in such a schema is revealing. Coming upon a preexisting, monolithic form (the so-called

"Hollywood paradigm"), oppositional cinema can only be understood in formalist theory as a play with codes, an excess, a surface disturbance of the monolith's form. The diversity of forms of political struggle can find no place in such an either/or approach. The idea that political struggle in art might take any other form than that of formal innovation gains no recognition from formalism. The result can only be an uncritical endorsement of avant-garde art. (I am not suggesting that there is no justification possible for avant-garde political art. I am merely suggesting that formalism answers the questions of such art before they're even asked.)

The historical fate of many avant-garde movements, their recuperation, suggests that irrationality, trans-logic, or whatever other qualities are attributed a subversive function in art can as well be potentially socially functional and supportive qualities. In some way, what has happened in formalism as a politics of art is similar to what French sociologist Jean Baudrillard sees as often, happening in *reductive* applications of the Marxist critique of political economy. Out of the multitude of practices which constitute the political identity of a society, one practice (for example, the practice of economic relations, according to a reductive Marxism is isolated from the complicated field of the interaction of practices and made to serve as the tool which explains everything else in an unequivocal way. [\[12\]](#) In contrast, Baudrillard suggests that politics and political control may not be so much a matter of control by one particularly dominating form or code (such as a code of Realism) but by a fluidity, a free-floating exchange and production of signs, whose political force lies in the fact that they have no one meaning, that, instead of expressing one value, they express a number of meanings at the same time. By this, the world can seem richer, it actually is.

Baudrillard goes on to suggest that this proliferation of signs (as in the different brands of the same product) has to be seen as a strategy in the game of social distinction and the maintenance of social hierarchies. Some groups actually possess values and power while other groups can only mimic that possession in the substitute realm of signs, not realizing that their ability to manipulate signs, to generate new signs, to play with forms, is no real power at all but only its alibi. For example, the person who can choose from an array of cars has the choice of different forms (a blue car, say, rather than a red one). But this sort of choice is a limited one, one which hides the fact of all the things that one may not have the power to choose (for example, one may be able to choose between a red and green Volkswagen but still not have the power to choose a more expensive car or to live where one does not have to rely on private automobiles).

What formalist theory will valorize as formal play, as innovation in excess of narrative and representation, Baudrillard therefore sees as a potentially reinforcing component of social position. The play of form makes a nice fit with the way capitalism attempts to maintain its values simply by a change of names, by a recourse to the new, the different. Bound to a real order of social relations, people often accept the

compromise position of power at the level of signs, not realizing that a play with signs, an attempt to change value through signs, may be a detour. Like Derrida's understanding of language as a play of *differances* which connects to no reality beyond it, formal play, as Baudrillard explains it, is an endless game, a continuous substitution of sign for sign — a play which cannot break out of infinite circulation in the realm of signs to engage in any kind of effective *praxis*. Signification becomes independent of the real social position of its players who can have a freedom with words and forms that they can't have elsewhere. Moreover, it is this separation which allows the social hierarchy to continue:

"This false dynamic is in fact completely overrun by the inertia of an unchangeable social system and its discrimination in the realm of *real* power" (Baudrillard, p. 55, my emphasis).

This is to suggest that much of the formal experimentation that a formalist critic like Burch values and encourages serves the precise function of making people see freedom where there is actually constraint of a very different sort. In his essay, "Upon Leaving the Movie Theater," Roland Barthes epitomizes the limitations of such a position when he argues that the central repressive function of film is its fixing of the spectator to an order of illusion, a mirror-like activity:

"the image captivates me, captures me, I *adhere* to the representation, and it is this adherence which founds the *naturalism* (the pseudo-nature) of the filmed scene." [\[13\]](#)

Barthes is then able to suggest that a different attitude in the spectator, an attention to other aspects of the film experience, would cut against this:

"I have two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which looks, lost in the close mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize, not the image, but precisely that which exceeds it: the grain of sound, the auditorium, the blackness, the obscure mass of other bodies, the rays of light, the coming, the going..." (ibid.).

But this excess has always been part of the film experience, one of the effects we go to movies for. The fascination of going to the movies is often that fascination for story *plus a something more*: a play of signs, a liberation of forms, a breakdown of illusion. This richness of experiences, this burst of signs which is the seeing of a movie, may exceed a narrative or the expression of a value system, but, as Baudrillard's analysis of commodities suggests, this excess is not necessarily *socially* excessive.

Ultimately, what a valorization of form and what most avant-garde theory lack is an understanding of the relation between artistic practice and other practices, especially the practices of social interaction.

Granting an autonomy and effect to art that it doesn't necessarily have, the adherents of an avant-garde aesthetic diminish political struggle by generalizing from their own situation and rewriting history from a particular and limited perspective.

However, at the same time, the real complexity and struggles of history exceed and show up the limitations of the formalist position.

Significantly, the course of Burch's own book gives in to the force of a kind of "political unconscious," a reminder of the political struggles beyond formalism. As if he in some unconscious way realized the limitations of an aesthetic so committed to form alone, the later chapter's of Burch's book deal with directors such as Nagisa Oshima who are explicitly radical in their assault on the meanings — cinematic but *also non-cinematic* — of Japanese culture. In these final 35 pages (of a 363-page book), there is a glimpse of a cinema which has change as its specific project, but it is no more than a glimpse. Despite his own claims to a Marxist aesthetic, Burch's attention points elsewhere, and in this lies the problem of his work.

## Notes

[1.](#) For a useful introduction to some of the political issues which Burch's work raises, see the debate between Martin Walsh and Chuck Kleinhans in *Jump Cut*, 10/11.

[2.](#) Burch's explicit reference is to Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1966), which is available in English translation as *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). A useful introductory piece by Derrida is "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *The Structuralist Controversy: the Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. and trans. Richard Macksey and Eugenio tionato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1972).

[3.](#) This material is forthcoming as a book, Burch has so far published two essays on Primitive Cinema in English: "Porter, or Ambivalence" in *Screen* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1978-1979): 91-105; and "Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response" in *October* 11 (1979): 77-96.

[4.](#) I owe the term "formal spectator" and the concept it refers to to Robert Vianello, Film Studies, UCLA.

[5.](#) Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, "Television: a World in Action," *Screen* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 7-59.

[6.](#) "The people who most need to study this [Japanese] cinema in its most 'radically' Japanese form are those committed to constructing a thorough-going critique of the dominant modes of Western cinema" (p. 17).

[7.](#) As recent feminist critiques of the use of the category of "Woman" as

Other have suggested, there is also something fundamentally oppressive about any appeal to a particular group (for Burch, the Japanese) as *inherently* critical by the fact of a supposed otherness. The consequence of such a procedure is to turn groups into essences, to give repressed groups no power other than a virtually magical (and unconscious) one as outsider. This is to rob social forces of the real power of their possible interventions in history.

[8.](#) Noel Burch and Jorge Dana, "Positions," *Afterimage* 5 (Spring 1974): 40-65.

[9.](#) Barry Salt, "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures," *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1974): 13-22.

[10.](#) See "The Cinematic Apparatus as Social Institution — An Interview with Christian Metz," *Discourse* 1 (Fall 1979): 7-37.

[11.](#) Philip Rosen, "Difference and Displacement in SEVENTH HEAVEN," *Screen* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 89-104.

[12.](#) I base my contents here on Baudrillard's *Pour une critique de l'economie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). In subsequent texts, Baudrillard abandons any affiliation with Marxism.

[13.](#) Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," *Communications* 23 (1975) (translated by Susan White and Bertrand Augst as "Upon Leaving the Movie Theater," *University Publishing* 6, Winter, 1979, p. 3).

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Screening out the past

by Eli Zaretsky

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Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

One of the keys to understanding our society lies in the corporate industrial transformation that took place between 1890-1920. Within a generation the United States changed from a nation of farmers and petty owners to a nation of workers, immigrants, and housewives. Most accounts of the period center on the reformers — the "Progressives" — who sought to rationalize industry, abolish child labor, and uphold morality in the urban environment. While there have been accounts of immigrants, labor, and feminism in this period, there has never been a synthesis which presented the diverse class forces of modern liberal America in a structured relation to one another. It is evidence of the importance of the movies to understanding twentieth-century United States that social historian Lary May's history of the industry in the epoch of D.W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille in fact takes an important step toward such a synthesis.

In his well-known article "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," art historian Erwin Panofsky argued that

"films — first exhibited in 'kinetoscopes,' viz., cinematographic peep shows, but projectable to a screen as early as 1894 — are, originally, a product of genuine folk art."

Panofsky stressed, as did Robert Sklar, Liz Ewen, and other historians of the movies, the extent to which U.S. movies emerged out of the needs and values of immigrant Americans in the early twentieth century. At the same time, the movies were also big business almost from the first and few cultural forms have been so rigidly controlled through both money and censorship. The particular value of May's book is in showing how the "folk art" aspect of the movies contributed to, and was ultimately subordinated by, the "social control" aspect.

According to May, a child in a late nineteenth-century U.S. town

"had by fourteen a culture ... He had made himself by easy and natural experience part of a conscious, an organized, a unified society."

This culture, which May calls Victorianism, was a class-based culture but it was transmitted as part of a way-of life in which work, family, and community were more or less integrated. By contrast, the *mass* culture which developed in the early part of the twentieth century is the culture of a fragmented society. In spite of being more democratic and less elitist, mass culture rests on the fragmented or alienated character of twentieth-century working-class life and on the "serialization" of the audience — the destruction of the primary ties, identifications, and communal sentiments that held small-town culture together. The audience of a mass society may come together to watch a movie, but they do not share a common experience, as the nineteenth-century opera, burlesque, lecture, or circus audience did. May sums up the transformation of rural, Victorian United States with a story from one memoirist, Henry Seidel Canby, who returned home in the 1920s to learn that his opera house had been turned into a movie theatre.

A critical aspect of this transformation was the radical separation of the family from the place of work; the family became the locus of modern personal life. This structural fact had important consequences for both the "folk art" and "social control" perspectives on the movies. From the "folk art" point of view, movies reflected the aspirations of twentieth-century men and women toward freedom and meaning in their personal lives, as well as being one form in which those aspirations were met.

From the "social control" point of view, Progressive reformers, spurred by a fear of ethnic and cultural fragmentation, sought to reestablish common cultural norms such as had existed a generation earlier. Movie censorship, of such great importance to the history of the movies, emerged out of the same "reform" impetus which produced prohibition, the crusades against prostitution, the playground movement, and other efforts to regulate the morality of the young. Such Progressive intellectuals as Edward Ross, Simon Patten, and Hugo Munsterberg — among the founders of U.S. social psychology — saw the efficacy of film as a form of social control. Because of its hypnotic power, because it did not need language, and because it occupied the newly created realm of leisure, film was strategic to the creation of the compensatory pseudo-unification that the "classless realm" of leisure offers. Sociologist Edward Ross was only one of the many intellectuals who saw the power of mass culture to encourage the acquiescence of the working class in the corporate capitalist regime by encouraging a focus on leisure and the family. According to Ross,

"Popular art does not precipitate us into the class struggle. The conflict is not so much between the warring classes as it is the two sides of human nature — appetite and will, impulse and reason, inclination and idea. Here if anywhere is the place for ethical considerations. Leisure is a conscious

matter. To acquaint young people with the good or ill effects of different varieties of recreation on the higher self is the surest way to wean them from what is frivolous and debasing."

Intellectuals such as Ross supplied the underlying rationale for censorship by stressing the power of ideas and communication to bring together a society in danger of fragmentation. Social work journals such as *The Survey* carried frequent articles on the importance of the movies. One reformer argued that film was "five times more powerful than any other form of communication." Film spoke directly to the subconscious, the nervous system, the realm of instinct and emotion. Its power to stir up emotions, especially sexuality, was equaled by its power to calm the masses and woo them from vice. The movies could function, wrote one reformer, as a "grand social worker," allowing the viewer to go home and "sleep the sleep of the just."

Although May does not argue this point, the early producers were almost all upwardly rising immigrants who shared these values and wanted to make of the movies something acceptable and native-born. Harry Cohn was the son of a German immigrant tailor; Sam Goldwyn was born Goldfish in Warsaw; Jesse Lasky was the son of a poor shoe salesman; Carl Laemmle was the son of a German estate agent; Marcus Loew, the son of an Austrian waiter; Louis Mayer, the son of a Hebrew scholar; Joseph Schenck, an immigrant from Germany; the Warner brothers were sons of poor cobblers. Besides being anxious to make money, these were men who sought to prove themselves in the United States and to create an industry that would win acceptance by the native elite.

By placing movies in this context, centered on the transformation of traditional culture and the family, May is able to show the underlying unity in a series of apparently unrelated phases of film history: especially the work of D.W. Griffith, the films of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, and the work of Cecil B. DeMille. Along the way, he illuminates such related phenomena as the comedies of Mack Sennett, the building of the movie houses during the 1920s, and the development of Hollywood.

In May's perspective, Griffith was able to synthesize the "folk" and "social control" strands that went into the creation of the movies. Griffith was a southern Democrat, a lover of Dickens, a correspondent of Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan; he was a believer in the "little ran" as well as being a visionary believer in the movies. As Griffith wrote:

"Are we not making the world safe for democracy? American democracy, through motion pictures? The increase of knowledge, the shattering of old superstitions, the sense of beauty have all gone forward with the progress 'of the screen. Our heroes are always democratic. The ordinary virtues of American life triumph. No Toryism. No Socialism."

Earlier films, Griffith believes, supplied mere titillation; he understood that movies must have a social and ethical content. Hence Griffith grasped the importance of narrative, for it is only through telling a story that one can make an ethical point. It was Griffith's desire to have film tell a story, as Dickens had told stories, that led him to his breakthroughs in editing technique, a point May does not make. Griffith believed the masses needed and wanted stories to uplift and educate them, stories that would reward virtue and punish vice. He believed that the movies could make history — the greatest of all stories — and high culture available to the masses. Above all, he appreciated the continued centrality of the family and of women to mass culture and sought to exploit their emotional resonance.

In my view, May overestimates the reactionary or "Victorian" element of the period of Griffith's hegemony. May relates his work to a debate among U.S. historians over whether the Progressives represented the outlook of the "small producers" of the nineteenth century (Griffith) or the "new middle classes" of the twentieth (DeMille). The great value of May's account, however, is that by stressing structural factors, he transcends this merely empirical effort to characterize what were, after all, a narrow stratum of Americans. May strikingly shows the continuity between Griffith's uplifting epics and the adventures and bedroom comedies which followed. The idealization of the family during the Progressive era, evident in Griffith's films, included considerable encouragement for experimentation, sexual liberation, and women's equality, evident in DeMille's films. The new currents of modernism were congruent with the working-class ideal of the family as a "classless realm" of personal freedom and expression.

May's chapter on Fairbanks and Pickford is, for me, the highlight of the book. Fairbanks represented the new man, continually escaping the routine of the office for romantic adventure in the American West, Latin America, or Europe. At a time when American men were being reduced to cogs in an assembly line or bureaucracy, Fairbanks showed that men had a new product to offer — their personalities and, above all, their bodies. Fairbanks was always smiling and was in constant motion. He said:

"Whenever we find that we are losing our ability to smile, let's have no false illusions. We are neglecting our physical well-being. Let us right then and there drop the sombre thoughts and ... run down the street and if possible into the country."

On the other hand, Mary Pickford represented the new woman. She was spunky and independent, a self-proclaimed working girl. She met a lot of men and she wanted to marry one on a basis of love, mutual respect, and sexual attraction. She held to the new ideal of marriage as a realm of pleasure and consumption rather than as a "way of life" organized around production. Pickford's popularity is akin, in May's interpretation, to Theda Bara's vamp: Bara noted how many letters she

received from married women who identified with her rather than with the spurned housewife.

Although May does not develop this point, the enormous popularity of Mary Pickford is especially revealing of the power of the movie industry to absorb and deflect critical tendencies in the society and turn them toward the end of social control. The Progressive era witnessed the final achievement of such reforms as suffrage and protection for working women, for which feminists had struggled for generations. Feminism also inspired a new ideal of marriage to be based on equality between men and women, on intimacy and frankness, and even on sexual pleasure for both sexes. The women's movement, in spite of its puritanical side, had led the way in the late nineteenth-century "repeal of reticence." And small but significant feminist tendencies in Greenwich Village and elsewhere drew on psychoanalysis, as well as feminism, to encourage women's demand for sexual satisfaction within marriage. Of course, the most important reform associated with these ideas was the legitimation of birth control.

Mary Pickford's incredible popularity by the early 1920s reflected the extension of these admittedly new and somewhat elitist ideals to the U.S. working class. As these ideals were extended, they lost their meaning. The difficult goal of equality and sexual love within marriage, with all it demands both of individual personality and social order, was trivialized to become a more or less titillating romance, in which consuming objects and being watched had become the highest forms of excitement.

Pickford was "sweet" like her nineteenth-century predecessors but she was also a "new woman," a working girl. She wrote:

"I like to see my own sex achieve. My success has been due to the fact that women like the pictures in which I appear. I think I admire most in the world the girls who earn their own living. I am proud to be one of them."

As such, she broke from the Victorian mode of purity. Drawing on her work experience, she was aware of men, aware of sex, and even sometimes aware of social problems, as in her *TESS OF THE STORM COUNTRY* (1914), in which she led a poacher's rebellion against the local sheriff. Above all, however, like Fairbanks she maintained the image of perpetual youth. She wrote:

"We are our own sculptors. Who can deny that passion and unkind thoughts show on the lines and expressions of our faces young people seldom have these vices until they start getting old, so I love to be with them. The impulses of youth are natural and good."

The triumph of her career, like Fairbanks's, was not in any movie but in their modish marriage and their famous Hollywood estate, Pickfair. In May's description, Pickfair was

"... a consumer's paradise that resembled an innocent doll's house ... Swimming pools, gyms, fountains and cultivated lawns supplied a private 'vacation land.' Inside, the couple decorated each room in the motif of a foreign country, so that the movement from one part of the house to another provided exotic adventure. In this kingdom of eternal youth, Doug and Mary highlighted continual newness by dipping into their vast wardrobes of stylish clothes for each of the day's activities: work, sports, dining, dancing, and parties. It followed that whenever the two sat for photographs, their smiles radiated happiness. A typical reporter described the Pickfair life as 'the most successful and famous marriage that the world has ever known.'"

As May shows, the identification of modern marriage with consumerism deepened during the twenties with the building of movie houses in which each patron was the star and with the building of a whole city — Los Angeles — in which the fantasies of utopian consumption were lived out in the glare of longed-for publicity. The "ever-youthful personalities" created by the star system, with their "palatial homes and lavish wardrobes containing hundreds of suits and shoes," showed an admiring public that "becoming self-made had taken a new form." The stars owed their success not to intelligence, achievement, or power but simply to their capacity to entertain people and make them happy. In this they were children, their narcissism mirroring and inciting the narcissism of their public, who democratically sought to live out the "lavish lifestyles" of their heroes and heroines. As actress Betty Blythe said when she looked at herself in the mirror in her first elaborate gown:

"I saw my body. I saw my legs, my torso, my long, long arms. I said, is that I? ... I had never looked at my body as a piece of statuary ... I had this marvelous feeling; it was most extraordinary. I can still feel the chills all over my body."

Needless to say, the new ideal of a perpetually youthful marriage or "lifestyle" represented a defeat of the long nineteenth-century struggle for a meaningful marriage and not its fulfillment. Although this is not the place to make the argument, it is likely that the "sexiness" of the "new woman" of the 1920s with the accompanying coyness and transience of the image also represented a decline in the hopes for passionate sexual relations to be found in the literature of the early twentieth century.

May is not the first historian to see expressed in the movies the compensatory fantasies of the depowered masses. Nor is he the first to understand that the movies were the agent of explicit social control. May's contents on Lillian Gish's Victorianism, Theda Bara's vamp, Mary Pickford's "new woman," and Gloria Swanson's bedroom appeal are not in themselves original. What is original, however, is May's ability to synthesize these and other scattered and sometimes contradictory insights into a coherent and plausible whole, whose central theme is the

emergence of the modern working class. True to the conventions of academic history, May is often not explicit about his assumptions and central argument. At points, he confuses the issue by relating his material to the aforementioned debate over Progressivism, which his framework really renders trivial. But these are small faults.

In 1936 Walter Benjamin linked film to the "tremendous shattering of tradition" that occurs with modern capitalist society, and he wrote, with the Nazis in mind,

"The growing proletarianization of modern man and increasing formation of the masses are two aspects of the same process." [\[1\]](#)

The problem of the relation of mass culture to the proletarianization and depoliticization of the twentieth-century working class remains as critical today as it was in the 1930s of Benjamin's essay, May's book is an important contribution to this question.

## Notes

[1.](#) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books), p. 241.

### Bolivian film critic murdered

by Alfonso Gumucio Dagron

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 68

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On the night of March 22, 1980, in La Paz, Luiz Espinal, the most important film critic in Bolivia and the editor of the political weekly *Aqui (Here)*, was kidnapped, tortured for hours, and finally killed. His body was abandoned outside the city, where a peasant found it the dawn of the following day.

Espinal was a most prolific film critic. And his critical activity was not limited to the pages of the weekly *Aqui* (which he wrote for after his dismissal from the daily *Presencia*). Rather it extended to radio and television and a complete series of film texts, among which are *Film History*, *Great Directors*, *Film and Television*, *Psychology and Film*, *Sociology of Film*, *Critical Consciousness as It Confronts Film*, etc.

Besides being a film critic. Espinal worked as a television scriptwriter and director, first in Spain in the sixties and later in Bolivia, where he directed the program *In Flesh and Blood*, in which he took up taboo themes such as prisons, political violence, prostitution, drugs, guerrilla warfare.

Luis Espinal's disappearance undermined the whole cinematic climate in Bolivia. He had been its principal force with his workshops, lectures, criticism, and books. Film criticism became reduced to a few names, and these disappeared from the pages of the press as it was censored months later with the military takeover. The Bolivian Association of Film Critics, which Espinal helped found in 1979, practically ceased to exist.

A year ago, 100,000 people accompanied Luis Espinal's corpse to the cemetery. It was the largest political demonstration ever seen in La Paz. In July, four months later, the assassins did away with the government, overthrowing the constitutional interim president, Lidia Gueiler. The intellectual and perhaps material force behind Espinal's kidnapping and assassination, Colonel Luis Arce Gomez, became minister of the interior under the military regime. The government, in the hands of the most retrograde sector of the Bolivian army, turned into an agent for a huge cocaine trade, a traffic which nets over \$1,500,000,000 according to

figures from the U.S. Congress.

Espinal was a free citizen who committed himself to the truth. Months before they assassinated him, he denounced the impending dictatorship each week in the pages of *Aqui*, citing by name those who were preparing the massacre. He did not know he would be its first victim, or maybe he did but that would not stop him from writing what he knew was the truth.

The night of March 22, 1980, as he was returning home on foot after having seen a film entitled MEN WITHOUT SOULS, a red jeep without license plates waited in the darkness to kidnap him. Not even the film he'd just come out of had more violence in it than did reality.

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### Measuring audience response

by Leonard Henry

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Last year in Rotterdam, Holland, a conference was held to discuss the effectiveness of various forms of media in political education. The conference was sponsored by the "Media and Society" section of the Dutch Sociological Association and was meant to be a confrontation between media producers and people who evaluate the effectiveness of media products, be it television programs for large audiences or film and video productions to be used to start discussions in small groups.

One of the major conclusions of the conference was that the research methods for evaluating the effect of mass media needed to be different from the research methods for evaluating the effect of discussion media.

A major subject for discussion was the research done in Germany to evaluate the effect which the television film *THE HOLOCAUST* had in different countries in Europe, particularly in West Germany.

Dr. Tilman Ernst, senior research associate at The Federal Institute for Political Education in Germany, reported on their research into the impact of this film on the political consciousness of the German people. Ernst concluded that the broadcast of the film did more, in terms of raising public discussion, than the joint efforts of politicians, teachers, preachers, professional political educators, etc., during the thirty-five preceding years. Within two weeks after the broadcast, his Institute had over 110,000 requests for specific documentation. They mailed out 250,000 discussion guides on request; 70,000 went to teachers. Forty percent of all teachers whose field is related to the issue (history, social studies, etc.) discussed the issue of the persecution of the Jews in their classes.

People became more aware of the detrimental aspects of national socialism, which had always been played down by various segments of the population. More and more voices were heard saying that Nazi terror had been over-exaggerated. A neo-Nazi movement was, and still is, growing in West Germany. According to Ernst's research, the film provided a counterbalance against the popularization of neo-Nazism.

Among many people with racist attitudes the film has raised doubts. THE HOLOCAUST forces the viewer to take a standpoint. Among the anti-Semites and among the so-called "neutral" viewers the film raised awareness that there is a problem. Public opinion concerning the issue of war crimes shifted immediately after the broadcast of THE HOLOCAUST against acquittal (from 51% for acquittal *before* the broadcast to 35% *after* the broadcast).

Ernst attributed the rather spectacular effort of THE HOLOCAUST in Germany to the dramatization formula of the television film, in which the social problem is personified in interhuman relationships. The relationship between the two families Dorf and Weiss represents the dilemma that many Germans found themselves in during the war, a dilemma that still exists when people are forced to take a stand on the German past. But does the identification through dramatization produce consciousness was the question raised in relation to the experiences with THE HOLOCAUST. According to Ernst, THE HOLOCAUST reached a great number of people who would never have been reached by any other method of political education. As a result of THE HOLOCAUST people started to look for other sources of information as well. According to the research the film was for many people a first step in becoming concerned about the German past.

Some scholars at the conference raised another objection. The danger in the use of an identification formula is that social problems become reduced to personal problems, tied to the personalities of the heroes and the heroines on the screen. Dr. Ernst replied that we should not only ask what happens to the viewer while he or she is watching the film, but how television programs can function as a trigger for public discussions which should be followed up by other campaigns of political education. Although identifying with fictional characters may be a problem, political educators feel that getting that discussion started is more important than exposing people to a nonfiction film they will walk away from before it is even finished.

People who use films in political education increasingly regard follow-up materials and/or discussion guides a prerequisite. West Germany and Austria are ahead in this respect because their institutes for political education have specialized research staffs to pre-test films for political education and design "useful materials for useful films." An example of such research was presented by Dr. Walter Goehring of the Austrian Institute for Political Education in Mattesburg. Dr. Goehring showed the film AUGUST! AUGUST! AUGUST!, which is a remake of the theatrical play by Pavel Kohut about the Prague spring of 1968. The theatrical characters allegorically express the problem of power and repression. The film version of this play handles the "identification through dramatization formula" in a didactic and controlled manner. The film clearly shows a theatre. There is no "escape" into a second reality as is the case in standard Hollywood productions. The formula of AUGUST! AUGUST! AUGUST! was inspired by Brecht's theory of alienation in the theatre.

According to Dr. Goehring's research this film form effectively leads to discussions on such a general issue as "power and repression," particularly as it relates to young people. The power constructs, shown on the stage, are recognized by and are often translated into the situations in which the children themselves are confronted with power and repression in their school or in their own family. At first sight it sounds awkward to put a stage production on film, but after looking at AUGUST! AUGUST! AUGUST! and learning about Dr. Goehring's experiences it begins to make sense.

After hearing about the research on theatrical productions, it proved very interesting to learn about experiences with documentaries in political education. Dr. András Szefkü, who is associated with the Institute for Mass Communications in Budapest, reported on his study on the evaluation of the feature length documentary GYURY CSEPLÖ, about the social situation of gypsy youth in Hungary. The aim of the research was to investigate to what extent this documentary succeeded in starting discussions of the prejudices concerning gypsies among Hungarian audiences.

The film, which depicts the experiences of three gypsy boys who leave their village and go to the big city, was shown to sixty audiences across the country. Most of the audiences were all Hungarian, but some of them were mixed Hungarian and gypsy. The research team recorded all discussions following the showings of the film and analyzed then to see whether the film helped the audiences discuss and perhaps overcome their prejudices.

The research gives a very interesting insight into the attitudes that prevail in Hungary regarding the assimilation or integration of gypsies into Hungarian society. Most Hungarians and gypsies follow the doctrine of the government that gypsies are to behave like Hungarians, i.e., integrate fully into Hungarian society. Only young intellectual gypsies defend the position that gypsies should obtain equal rights and equal treatment but at the same time should be entitled to maintain their own culture. The analysis of the discussions reveals that for most Hungarians, the gypsy culture is associated with such qualities as laziness and stupidity. In forty of the sixty discussions someone in the audience told the standard story about the gypsy family who moved into a modern home and used the parquet floor to burn in the stove.

The film, however, provides counterevidence against such prejudices. The major thrust of the film is the proposition that the social backwardness of gypsies finds its roots in the attitudes of the Hungarians toward the gypsies. Whenever gypsies were in the audience, they felt supported by the film. For almost all of them it was the first time that they discussed "the gypsy problem" with Hungarians. Szekfü concluded that the film was effective in sensitizing the Hungarians and breaking down the generally prevailing opinion that the problems gypsies have in Hungarian society can be attributed to their ethnic differences.

An even more specific piece of research concerning the effect of the documentary form on group discussions in political education was presented by a research team of the Sociological Institute of the University of Utrecht. Here the research people had themselves made a film with various versions. One version shows the problem of a specific population group (in this case the Maoris of New Zealand) exclusively from the point of view of the underdog while in a second version the film also presents the point of view of the dominant culture. The Maoris, who rally to retain the rights to their land which they lost as a result of the colonization of New Zealand, argue that their land was confiscated through devious tricks. The European immigrants maintain that they obtained the land in a legal way through sales and treaties signed by the Maori leadership. The film which gives the one-sided presentation (i.e., which shows only the Maori point of view) tended to generate a stronger emotional involvement. There was more polarization in the discussion because each time this version of the film was shown, one or more students protested against the "one-sidedness" of the film. They would then try to invent the arguments that the whites of New Zealand would have to nullify the arguments of the Maoris. This in turn tended to infuriate the students who defended the point of view of the Maoris, thus escalating the polarization. The second version of the film, where the point of view of the Maoris is juxtaposed to the point of view of New Zealand whites (represented by statements by the Minister of Maori Affairs and some street interviews with ordinary citizens) tended to generate less heated discussion while at the same time there was somewhat more support for the stand of the Maoris and virtually no support for the position of the whites.

There was general agreement that Hollywood-type films like THE HOLOCAUST, though not specifically made for political education, can be effective in triggering public discussions about social issues that concern millions of people. However, it was also agreed that very specific research is required to determine the usefulness of such films and to prepare tailored brochures and discussion guides to ensure a proper use by those who use the films for purposes of political education.

Filmed stage productions like AUGUST! AUGUST! AUGUST! can generate discussions about general issues among specific limited audiences. Documentaries are more appropriate for audiences which have already some interest in the areas that are to be discussed.

We can effectively evaluate mass media by qualitative survey techniques (as in the case of THE HOLOCAUST). To evaluate media made especially for political education in small groups, we need qualitative research methods to analyze the discussions after the showing and in-depth interviews with spectators preferably before and after the film screening and discussion. These in-depth qualitative research techniques are still in an early stage of development. Some experience can be borrowed from the researchers who do standardized pre-testing of advertising commercials. However, the substance under study in the

case of advertising is of a qualitatively different order, as compared to the substance under study in the case of the evaluation of a process of political education.

It is therefore of considerable importance that research in this field be stimulated and discussed, not only by research people among themselves but also by filmmakers and people who use films in political education.

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### Theater janitors on strike

by Gail Sullivan

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Some people think the best thing at the movies these days is the popcorn and the other snackbar treats. Considering Hollywood's latest offerings, they may well be right. Although the price of tickets has skyrocketed, it is a well known fact that theater owners have always depended on their sales at the snackbar to make a profit.

Apart from profits, however, the most tangible indication that anyone was in the theater is the trash in the aisles. For the workers who clean up the mess it's a dirty job, but it provides a living. Depending on the size of the theater, a janitor sweeps, mops, vacuums, and cleans all the restrooms in a three or six hour shift.

This August, the 250 member Theater and Amusement Janitors, Local 9 (SEIU) asked for a 9% raise to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Although all the other theaters have signed agreements with the union, the Syufy Enterprises and the multinational United Artists have refused to sign. Unable to reach agreement, the janitors walked out of these chains' nine area theaters on September 29. UA and Syufy have joined forces to break the union. Both chains have hired teenagers at the minimum wage to replace the strikers and still refuse to meet with the union. "This is an attack on unionism," says Business Agent Sal Roselli. "The only way we're going to win this strike is to get support of the people — the people who attend the theaters."

Local 9 has been cleaning movie houses and theaters in San Francisco since 1902. Their last strike, also against UA, was twelve years ago. It lasted fourteen months. Despite their size, the union got a big show of support in November when several hundred community and trade union members, including Teamsters, Culinary Workers, and ILWU members, rallied in front of several of the struck theaters. Since that time, various progressive groups have "adopted" a theater and help out the janitors by doing picket duty.

Although the local media has completely ignored the union and its strike, Local 9 is encouraged by these acts of solidarity and is currently

seeking support from various Bay Area Labor Councils to initiate a boycott of the theater chains. There is more to a movie than a good story and popcorn.

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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## The last word Fat and sassy

by the editors

from *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, p. 69

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We have an abundance of good, exciting reviews and articles for upcoming issues. In fact, our desks are spilling over. This gratifies us very much in an era when so many left publishing ventures have gone under or lost their vitality. The energy of our Editorial Board and friends, our ongoing involvement in practical political activity and media work, our contacts with cultural activists around the world have all generated much material for which there are hardly any other outlets. It's our experience, in fact, that we've created a whole range of writing for people concerned, about culture and politics. We've set the pace, put topics on the agenda, and developed positions others have then had to address.

All this abundance, however, has created a problem — we can't publish the material fast enough and a backlog has built up. With our limited human and financial resources we've been able to publish only two or three issues a year. Last summer the three co-editors and the JUMP CUT group in Berkeley discussed this dilemma, searching for creative solutions.

We realized that in seven and one-half years JUMP CUT has changed. From frequent, short issues, concentrating heavily on Hollywood films, we've moved to less frequent, longer issues, covering a whole range of topics: especially radical film history, feminism and sexual politics, lesbian and gay male criticism, film theory, third world film, independent political films, reportage, pedagogy, and television. Clearly, one way to reduce the backlog of manuscripts would be to cut out some of these areas. There are, for example, readers who want us to return to our original concentration on Hollywood, while others want us to devote more space to theory or independent film. Yet in our discussions it was clear that we don't want to cut out any area of study. Dealing with all these different areas is vital to our conception of cultural work and to our desire to provide the analytical tools people need to understand and change life under capitalism.

Furthermore, we want to continue publishing articles with a wide range of politics, writing styles, and levels of discourse. We see this diversity as one of the reasons for the magazine's vitality and wide readership in the face of a moribund capitalism and a bourgeoisie devoid of ideas or vision. By being open to a wide range of material we have encouraged new writers, women and third world writers, and people with unconventional ideas and stances as well as with valuable insights and information. Many of the finest articles we have published were rejected by other magazines as too political, too feminist, too strange, too complicated, too long — or just too uncomfortable. We have decided, in the short run at least, to tighten our criteria somewhat and to put more of the editing burden on writers so we can concentrate on production. But we don't see any valid way to reduce our abundance. Who would want to?

Therefore, we have turned to the area of production in search of a solution. With our limited editorial resources we can publish at most three or four issues a year. Although it is not possible to publish more frequently, it is our experience that once layout is under way we can expand issues relatively easily, as with our 60-page issue, No. 24/25. However, the heavy book paper we have been using since issue No. 14 limits the expansion of an issue; physically, because that paper is hard to fold, and financially, because it is very expensive relative to the newsprint we used for the first 13 issues. We cannot continue publishing 60-page issues on that paper.

Back in 1977 we switched to the book paper because people wanted to preserve many of the articles they found in JUMP CUT for future reference. Also book paper doesn't yellow on newsstands where 60% of our sales take place. Certainly, the heavier paper looks, feels, and reads better. We get better photo reproduction with it. And it has become a fairly common and recognizable format for cultural magazines (e.g., *Art Week*, *Afterimage*, *New Art Examiner*). Although we had some worry about the loss of flexibility and the cost, we went ahead with the change.

However, we have had to reopen this question. Basically, our highest priority has always been to publish all the good radical writing on film and related topics we can, at a cost people can afford. At this moment in history, it is particularly important to provide good political cultural analysis, to bring writers, readers, and mediaworkers together, to provide the left with an active, engaged forum for discussion of key cultural issues, and to respond to immediate political needs of the movement. For these reasons, we must return to newsprint for the foreseeable future.

Factors that go into deciding what goes in an issue are overall balance of the issue (a variety of styles, topics, etc.), clustering together complimentary and contrasting material, topicality of reviews and reports, length and space available, and whether something has been held over from previous issues. We know that long delay in handling and finally publishing some manuscripts is very hard on writers. We

hope this new plan will speed things up. And we hope you will bear with us and continue to support JUMP CUT. Your support, interest, and feedback make it all possible.

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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## The last word Radical culture work in the Reagan era

by the editors

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As the full scope of Reagan politics becomes evident, we see the concrete result of the so-called "drift to the right" of the 70s. The concerted economic attack on the working class which began with Nixon's New Economic Policy over a decade ago has been joined by the present cutbacks in welfare and social services, an offensive against the gains made by women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, an increase in racist violence, wholesale dumping of health, safety, and environmental protections, intransigent militarism, increasing war preparations, and the prospect of extensive military intervention to prop up U.S. imperialism abroad.

As dangerous as these developments seem to everyone concerned with peace and human justice, we are not depressed or discouraged by the current situation because we also see a new resurgence of opposition activity, of fighting back. While the current situation invites comparison with the growth of the New Left and the anti-war movement in the 60s, we see important differences too. Today we have a large pool of experienced political activists who didn't join the "me" generation and the "culture of Narcissism," but who spent the 70s engaged in the long, slow, and unglamorous process of building local projects, doing long term organizing work, building specific issue and constituency movements. With a political understanding gained from practical experience as well as theoretical discussion, this group forms a key resource in building a new opposition to capitalism, racism, and patriarchy.

Today we also have a substantial group of cultural workers who are experienced in radical media work, who have built networks and alternative institutions ranging from film and video making groups to distribution and exhibition organizations, and who have been active in and worked closely with political projects. At present activists working

in Central American anti-imperialist struggles have a broad range of film, video, and slide materials for organizing and education, compared with the meager resources available in the early years of the Vietnam war. And we see a new sophistication and inventiveness in dealing with the mass media in events such as the Diablo Canyon anti-nuclear power protests this year, where demonstrators were able to stay in the news and present their case and actions repeatedly. These provide encouraging signs of commitment and maturity in political media activity.

We live in a literate, electronic communication, mass culture society. To be effective, the left must understand and use the media where possible and to work in, around, and in spite of the mass media's institutions when necessary. While radical cultural work is not autonomous from other kinds of political activity, it has its own nature and possibilities, which must be understood in order to develop an adequate strategy for change and effective tactics for struggle. This means analysis and practical work must proceed with both an accurate and sophisticated critique of the dominant cultural institutions under direct capitalist control such as Hollywood and the TV networks and also with a realistic understanding of how, where, and why to build alternatives to the status quo.

Obviously JUMP CUT is such an alternative institution. The radical movement needs its own institutions, not because we will gradually build a parallel culture that will simply take over when it's large enough, and not because we think alternatives are "purer" or able to break totally from the dominant ideology of our society. It's because only alternative institutions and projects can openly and continually fight back, provide a reference group for media activists, establish a basis for accountability within the movement, and provide the support for protracted resistance. Only publications and projects which are financially independent of state and corporate funding have a material basis for challenging the dominant order. And with Reagan's present and future declared intention of slashing federal arts and humanities budgets and giving top priority to elite well-established institutions, the prospects for grass roots projects and alternatives are getting dinner all the time. Will this drive some to a more conformist stance? Will it produce a new spirit of independence and opposition?

It remains to be seen what other publications will do, but the example of the British film journal, *Screen* is instructive. In over ten years of being run by and written by nominal Marxists, this state-funded publication has never produced an institutional analysis of the British Film Institute, although many of the magazine's writers work in and around the BFI. Reading the past decade of *Screen* one would never know there has been an ongoing massive struggle for racial equality in Britain and a military occupation of Northern Ireland. While studiously avoiding such fundamental Marxist concepts as "class," and "class struggle," the publication's writers have scolded with great gusto feminists, political activists, and documentary filmmakers for theoretical impurity. Such

selective vision over such a long period of time certainly indicates something which seems suspiciously self-serving.

Radical cultural workers cannot be "above" the movement or on the sidelines from it. They cannot hide behind their presumed expertise and in-group jargon. They must be part of the movement and take stands and actions within it. And the movement today demands that one grapple with issues of imperialism, class, racism, and sexism as integral parts of an oppressive system. That means men have to listen to and come to terms with feminism intellectually and personally. That means white North Americans and Europeans have to overcome their racism and ethnocentrism by learning about and from Third World people.

To be detached on principle or in practice is to play the flip side of the Old Left political assumption that art and culture are instrumental — a "service" to the movement. Cultural workers have to learn about politics, to become an inherent part of the movements they are working with. They cannot act as specialists whose political arena is the one ring circus of other culture specialists. Nor can they act as professionals who provide a service without questioning the goals and activities of those they serve.

Almost all cultural workers, almost all JUMP CUT readers, and certainly the three writers of this editorial, belong to the petty bourgeoisie, that class that exists between the ruling class of capitalists and the working class. The genius of this class is precisely to stay in the middle, to vacillate, to remain ambiguous and detached from the historical forces and actions surrounding it. Constantly trying to play both ends against the middle, the petty bourgeoisie is expert at trying to turn mass movements and capitalist imperatives to its own ends. In the present era it internalizes its schizophrenic social-political situation and copes by asserting extreme individualism, claiming irony as freedom and copping out from commitment.

All of which is not to dismiss petty bourgeois individuals from the stage of history. But it is to underline the idea that cultural workers in particular must get beyond the self-validating world of like-minded professionals, of working only within established state and corporate institutions, the art world, and the media ghetto. Increasingly the times demand decision — to not cross a picket line, to join a demonstration, to help a group working for change, to speak out against injustice and repression. We don't get to choose the historical moment in which we live, but we do determine our stance toward that moment. The time is now. Seize the time.